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PARADISE COURT

BOOKS BY
J. S. FLETCHER

PARADISE COURT
THE BLACK HOUSE IN HARLEY STREET
THE PINFOLD
I'D VENTURE ALL FOR THEE
HARDICAN'S HOLLOW
THE HARVEST MOON
DANIEL QUAYNE
MARCHESTER ROYAL
THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL
MILL OF MANY WINDOWS
THE VALLEY OF HEADSTRONG MEN
SECRET OF THE BARBICAN
THE HEAVEN KISSED HILL
THE COPPER BOX

PARADISE COURT

BY
J. S. FLETCHER



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PART THE FIRST
IN LONDON

Chapter. I

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

ABOUT eleven o'clock on the night of the twenty-seventh day of May in the year of grace one thousand nine hundred and six, two very dear friends, one, Mr. John Aubrey Rivington, the other, Mr. Richard Grenville Wells, united again that afternoon after a separation of three years—necessitated by Mr. Wells's absence, on foreign service, in the Pacific Ocean—came out of the Criterion Theater into Piccadilly Circus, and, after lighting cigarettes, strolled slowly away, arm in arm, in the direction of the Albany, where Mr. Rivington had recently begun to keep house after the fashion of wealthy young gentlemen who, for a time at least, are disposed to lead bachelor lives. It was a beautiful night, and there were many people about, and there were laughter and jest and the sounds of the voices of many nations in the air, together with much to notice and many scenes to see, which only Piccadilly Circus in the hours immediately preced-

ing and immediately following midnight can show, and both Mr. Wells and Mr. Rivington were quite happy. Neither had the slightest notion—would not have believed an angel from heaven had he warned them of it—that their feet were on the threshold of a new experience, that within a few minutes they were about to hear the curtain rung up on a strange, a startling drama in which they themselves were destined to play no inconsiderable parts.

Let us look at these two young gentlemen as they pause in the full glare of a powerful lamp, waiting, as leisured folk will wait, for an opportunity of crossing Piccadilly without haste or trouble. Beyond the fact that each is youthful there is no similarity between them. Mr. Rivington is tall; Mr. Wells is—somewhat stumpy. Mr. Rivington is slender and willowy; Mr. Wells is stoutly built and looks as if nothing could break him. Indeed, the two, seen together, form a notable contrast. Mr. Rivington is one of those fortunate individuals upon whom Nature lavishes all that she can give, and lavishes it royally. He has a beautiful figure, a beautiful face, beautiful eyes, beautiful hair. The oval face, lighted by the deep dark eyes, in which there is something of sadness, or at least of pen-

siveness, causes even the ribald street boys to look at it a second time, and the flower girls to sigh involuntarily. If Mr. Rivington had had the chiseling of his own features he could not have chiseled them more perfectly, had he been as great a master as Praxiteles himself. If Mr. Rivington had had the coloring of himself he could not have colored himself more delightfully—the perfect olive of his complexion, the faint suspicion of pomegranate color breaking through it, the dark line of his level brows, the darker aureole of his blue-black hair on which there was a sheen like that on a raven's wing—these things were the admiration of many. To see him as he stands now in the full light of the lamp, toying with his jeweled cane, smiling indulgently with those beautifully curved lips of his at some joke of his companion's, is to see a young Greek god, ambrosial, gracious—clad, it is true, in the conventional garb which gentlemen wear of an evening in civilized lands—and yet godlike.

There is nothing of the Antinous in his friend, Mr. Richard Grenville Wells. Mr. Wells's complexion is sandy and his homely face is liberally sown with freckles. His nose is a snub, and his mouth is much too wide. If he took off his hat you would see that his hair is decidedly carrotty

in hue. His eyes are small, and the eyebrows and eyelashes are of a pale straw color. All about his mouth, on either side, are innumerable little wrinkles and lines which seem to denote that Mr. Wells is fond of laughter. Indeed, as he stands by Mr. Rivington's side at the edge of the curb, he is perpetually smiling or laughing. If you were close enough to hear it you would find that his tongue is as restless as his mobile mouth, and that everything he says is in the nature of a jest. For of late Mr. Wells's shrewd eyes have been looking at vastly different things—on long vistas of solitude, on vast stretches of the things-which-never-seem-to-cess, and his ears have heard silences that you could lay hands on—and to him, philosophic in a dry-humored fashion, because of these influences, the kaleidoscope of London seems infinitely amusing.

These two young gentlemen, presently leaving Piccadilly and traversing the courtyard of the Albany, passed under the clock at its northern side and, following the covered way which leads to the Burlington Gardens end of that select preserve, turned into one of the entrances on the right-hand side. There Mr. Rivington producing a latchkey, they suddenly passed from bare walls and a rather bad light into a paradise

of bachelor comfort. It was only necessary to give one glance at Mr. Rivington's entrance hall to know that you were in the chambers of a person of taste. Here was no hat rack, umbrella stand, hall table, no worm-eaten fox's mask or dilapidated stag's head ornamenting walls covered with paper manufactured in imitation of stained oak—here, rather, were delicately tinted walls whereon were charmingly framed old prints, delicate china, a case or two of rare glass, a hanging lamp which had illumined some Florentine chamber in long-dead days—here was the scent of flowers mingling with the indescribable atmosphere of warmth, luxury, wealth. Mr. Wells sniffed at this combination of aromas and compared it with the scent of the sea.

As Mr. Rivington and his guest walked into this refined and artistic entrance hall by one door there came into it by another a person whose face, figure, and general air proclaimed him that most wonderful product of these later ages—the perfect manservant. He was a man of presumably forty years of age, of medium height, slim and wiry, adroit and subtle in his movements, the sort of man who never seems to be looking at anything but who sees everything; who never seems to be engaged but is always

busy. Everything about him, the neatness and correctness of his attire, the scrupulous cleanliness of his soft white hands, the mathematical accuracy of the almost imperceptible triangle of whisker on each cheek, denoted care and attention to detail; the softness of his footfall on the thick carpet promised well for the nerves of whoever might be fortunate enough to employ him.

"Any letters, Etheredge?" inquired Rivington, as the man took his master's cloak and Wells's overcoat.

"None, sir, with the exception of those to which I drew your attention this evening," replied Etheredge, in a soft, even voice.

"Oh, to be sure. Well, now, it's getting late and I don't think we shall want you any more. I suppose everything is all right in Mr. Wells's room?"

"Everything is perfectly in order in Mr. Wells's room, sir."

"All right, good-night, Etheredge."

"Good-night, sir."

The man, carrying the coats, hats, and sticks, disappeared through the door from whence he had emerged—Rivington and Wells passed through an open doorway on the right of the hall.

"Invaluable chap, Etheredge," said Riving-

ton carelessly, as they entered a brilliantly lighted room. "If doing whatever you can do really well is a mark of greatness, Etheredge is a great man. Now, Dickie, my dear, dear boy, here we are at home, and we'll have a good talk. But first just let me glance through these letters—look here, get yourself a drink and find a cigar, there's everything there, Etheredge always sees to that."

"All right, Jack," said Wells. "Read your letters."

He went over to a side table whereon the capable Etheredge had set out such small creature comforts as young men who have already dined very well earlier in the evening are in need of somewhere about midnight, sandwiches of various sorts, whisky, mineral waters, cigars, cigarettes. He selected a cigar, mixed himself a peg of whisky and soda, and stared around him as he raised the glass to his lips. He was contrasting his ship's quarters with his friend Rivington's rooms. If the entrance hall without had been an approach to paradise, the room in which he stood was paradise itself. Here were the things that most appealed to Rivington, as Wells knew—rare prints, rare china, rare glass, rare books, all things delicate, beautiful, instinct with art.

The room breathed art. There was not an object in it that did not represent some triumph of the artistic mind, not even a chair that was not without some peculiar beauty of its own. But to Wells, who knew next to nothing about either pictures or books, the objects which most appealed were two Japanese spaniels lazily reclining in a square basket in the center of the hearth, their green jade eyes blinking at the soft flames.

Holding his glass in his hand Wells began to examine some prints on the wall behind the little supper table. He was wondering vaguely how fellows like Rivington managed to spot the beauties of these things, how they——

“My God!”

He turned sharply. Rivington, who had been standing at an *escritoire*, turning over some letters, was now turned from it as if some sudden shock had spun him round. He grasped a sheet of notepaper in one hand; the other hand was running its long fingers through his hair. He looked the incarnation of astonishment, of perplexity, almost of horror.

Wells crossed the room at two strides.

“What’s the matter, Jack?” he said sharply, laying his hand on his friend’s arm.

Rivington shook the hand off. He stared wildly about him.

"No—wait—wait!" he said. "I'll—— Etheredge—Etheredge!"

He struck a bell twice as he shouted the man's name. Before its silvery sound had died the servant was in the room, cool, self-possessed.

"You rang, sir?"

"Etheredge!—you see this letter—look, it was posted in the West Central District this morning—look at the office mark—before eleven o'clock. When 'did it come? How is it I have only just received it?"

The man looked at the envelope which Rivington held out to him. He handed it back politely.

"Yes, sir—that letter was delivered here at two o'clock this afternoon," he said quietly. "You will remember, sir, that you lunched out, and that when you returned you had very little time to get down to Victoria in time to meet Mr. Wells. I drew your attention to the letters then, sir, and you replied that you would read them after. Later, following Mr. Wells's arrival, you and Mr. Wells, sir, went out, and when you came in again you were pressed for time in dressing for dinner. I again reminded you of the let-

ters, and you replied that you would attend to them to-night. I did not know the handwriting on that letter, sir," concluded Etheredge, with almost imperceptible significance, "or I should have drawn your particular attention to it."

Rivington uttered an exclamation of chagrin.

"Quite right, Etheredge, quite right! My fault entirely—entirely! Thank you, Etheredge. I say, Etheredge, though, I wish you would not go to bed just yet—it's more than likely that I may want you."

"Very good, sir."

The man went out of the room as quietly and unobtrusively as he had entered it. A deep silence followed his going, broken at last by one of the Japanese spaniels, which rose, stretched itself, and uttered a little cry of sleepiness ere it settled down again. Wells waited, watching.

"Look here, Dogger!"

Wells knew that something big was coming. In the old school days he, from a certain bulldog-like pertinacity, had always been known as Dogger Wells; just as Rivington, because he was always painting—himself much more than his canvases—was popularly styled "Daubs." Rivington, in this moment of evident trouble, had gone straight back to the old sobriquet.

Wells argued from that that the trouble must be serious. He followed the unconscious lead.

"All right, Daubs, old boy—out with it," he said.

Rivington tapped the letter which he still grasped.

"Dogger, I'm in a hole! Look here—I must tell you—there's no one else—at least, no man. Listen carefully—sometimes during the past year or so I have gone to a sort of salon, a reception you know, at Madame de Marlé's, a very accomplished Frenchwoman, who likes to get round her clever young people, artists of all sorts—authors, musicians, painters—you know. There, some months since, I met a girl—Yvette de St. Evreux."

Rivington paused and drew his finger slowly across the line of his lips.

"Go on, Daubs," said Wells.

"I—well—I fell in love with her. Never mind how or why—I am in love with her. I want to make her my wife—will, must make her my wife! I found out that she was a governess in some City man's family in Regent's Park—and once or twice I have met her alone. To-morrow I was going to meet her again and ask her to marry me. I meant you to be best man, Dogger, for I

swear she loves me! And to-night comes this note from her. Listen:

“‘I am obliged to leave England at once, never to return. Since we shall most probably—no, certainly—never meet again, I wish to tell you that while life lasts in me I shall never cease to think of you and to pray for your happiness and your prosperity. Since it must be so—good-bye.

“‘YVETTE.’

“Do you hear, Dogger? ‘Never to return’—‘never meet again’! What does it——”

The sharp ringing of a bell in the entrance hall interrupted Rivington’s eager inquiry. The bell rang again and yet again. Then they heard the outer door open and Etheredge’s voice mingling with first one then two strange voices in seeming altercation.

Rivington, still grasping the letter, strode toward the door. Before he had taken two steps across the room the door was flung open from without.

Chapter II

WHERE IS MISS DE ST. EVREUX?

IF WELLS had not known that this was an affair of serious importance to his old schoolmate he would have burst into hearty laughter at the scene which revealed itself when the door was thrown wide open. Framed by the white and gold of the doorway stood an elderly gentleman, who was not only somewhat full of habit but very red of face, and, at the moment of his entrance, in an obviously choleric state of temper. He was a shortish, stout man with a bald head, a hanging under lip, and a double chin; there was a distinct stain of wine on the front of his highly glazed shirt, and he had evidently come away from whatever place he had left in such a desperate hurry that the light overcoat which he had shuffled on over his evening clothes was all on one side, and gave him a disheveled and even a dissolute appearance. But all this was lost in the fierceness of the gaze which he directed upon

Rivington. On him the new arrival's eyes fastened as tigers set their regard on a quarry implacably pursued and at last run to close quarters. But this gentleman was not alone. A little in his rear, and a little to the right, hovering uncertainly, as small boys move on the edge of a crowd, seeking a favorable opportunity for dodging into place and prominence, was a lady, middle-aged, matronly, determined-looking. She, too, gave the impression of having risen somewhat hastily from dinner and having been too much concerned with the business in hand to do more than throw a very light shawl around her plump shoulders in a careless fashion. In her face, as in the stoutish gentleman's in the doorway, there were written all the laws and conventions—together with a certain titillating delight at being mixed up in even an outside fashion with something unusual and wicked.

Behind these two persons stood Etheredge, very quiet and composed, but secretly foaming with rage. These late visitors had beaten down his suave words, his expostulations, finally, his point-blank denials, and had forced an entrance. He, Etheredge, felt himself disgraced.

Rivington drew a step nearer the door. He gazed inquisitively at the rotund figure before

him, and quite unconsciously to himself his face assumed the smile of polite, tender interest which won him a welcome anywhere.

“I think I have not the pleasure——” he began.

The stoutish gentleman glared as a lion might glare at soft words spoken to it at the wrong time. He spoke—firmly and pointedly:

“Sir, I believe I have the honor of addressing Mr. John Aubrey Rivington?”

Rivington bowed and smiled. The irate gentleman went on:

“Sir, I shall not stand upon ceremony; we crave no pardon for an intrusion which is warranted. Sir, I am Mr. Wisden Willoughby of Cumberland Terrace, Regent’s Park, and of Willoughby, Crampson & Porterway, of Leadenhall Street. Sir, allow me to introduce my wife—Mrs. Wisden Willoughby!”

Rivington bowed and smiled once more—the tender, sympathetic smile of one who says, “Yes, I am trying hard to understand you, but take your own time—take your own time.” He handed a chair in Mr. Willoughby’s direction. Mr. Willoughby stretched forth a fat white hand whereon a fine diamond sparkled. His full voice rose again:

"Sir, no ceremony, I beg. Sir, Mrs. Wisden Willoughby and I are here on a matter of the gravest importance. You see before you, sir, the employers of Mamzel Yvette de St. Evreux."

Rivington uttered a sharp exclamation. He turned instinctively to Wells. Wells, who had been keeping a keen eye on him, gave him a look that acted upon him like a douche of cold water and sent him round again to his visitors, pulled together.

"The employers of Miss de St. Evreux?" he said. "I am glad to see you, Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby. Will you not be seated?"

Once more the thrusting forth of the virtuous hand—once more the action suggestive of keeping apart from questionable things.

"I beg, sir—no ceremony. Sir, Mrs. Wisden Willoughby and I are here to discharge a painful duty. In the discharge of that duty, sir, I ask you to tell me—where is Mamzel de St. Evreux?"

Rivington lifted his hand to his forehead and drew his fingers wearily across it from temple to temple. He sighed.

"I do not know!" he answered. "I wish—I wish I did!"

"Buck up, you damned old ass!" whispered

Wells, hovering in his rear. "Chuck the sentimental, quick!"

Mr. Willoughby glared more fiercely than ever.

"You do not know, sir? You—you dare to stand there—you, a young man, a young gentleman of—of quality, of—of position—and tell me that you do not know what has become of Mamzel de St. Evreux? Sir, I *demand* to know what has become of Mamzel de St. Evreux. I *will* know what has become of Mamzel de St. Evreux! Mamzel de St. Evreux, sir, is the instructress, the guide, the—the friend and philosopher of my—my progeny, sir, and I stand to her, sir, in the light of guardian and protector, stand to her, sir, *in loco parentis*. Mamzel de St. Evreux, sir, has quitted my roof, and I have every reason to believe—founded, sir, upon the most convincing evidence—that she has done so at your instigation!"

In the silence that followed Wells found himself swearing hard under his breath. What was the matter with Rivington? Why, instead of speaking it right out, did he stand there, propping his willowy figure up on the back of a chair, making faces at the ceiling, the walls, at the Willoughbys, at him, even at Etheredge, who stood a picture of dismay and blank amazement in the

doorway? He looked like a man who is suddenly floored, suddenly confronted with a question which he cannot answer. And why did he, at intervals, laugh so strangely?

"I demand, sir, an answer to my question," thundered Mr. Willoughby. "Sir, I will *have* an answer to my question!"

Rivington suddenly pulled himself up. He was trying to steady himself, but his face twitched a little.

"Yes—yes," he said hesitatingly. "I—I—am sorry, Mr. Willoughby, that I have been so—so long in answering your question, but the truth is I am—upset. The truth is also, Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, I do not know where Miss de St. Evreux is—would to God I did!"

"Buck up, you damned idiot!" whispered Wells, in the rear. Then, taking matters into his own hands he bustled forward and said, "I say, look here, don't you know—Rivington's a bit bowled over, don't you see? Won't you sit down and have a drink and just hear what he's got to say, quietly?—Etheredge!"

"Sir?"

"Give your master a brandy and soda. Won't you have a drink yourself, sir?"

Mr. Willoughby lifted the fat white hand once more.

"Nothing of the sort for me, I beg," he replied stiffly. "My business here——"

"Mr. Willoughby," said Rivington, recovering himself, "I will settle your business quickly. I know nothing of the present whereabouts of Miss de St. Evreux; it was not until this evening—not until a few minutes ago—that I heard of her departure from England."

Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby spoke in chorus:

"Departure from England!"

"Of her departure from England—on her own confession. Here, Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, is a letter which I received from Miss de St. Evreux to-night—it is the only letter I have ever had from her, and you will see that she speaks in it of a final farewell to England—and to me."

The two faces which were turned upon Rivington when the letter had been perused were full of surprise, astonishment, incredulity. Rivington, growing more and more in command of himself, went on:

"Now that I know who you are, I will tell you all. It is now some months since I first met Miss de St. Evreux at the salon of Madame de Marlé,

of whom you have no doubt heard her speak. I was at once attracted to her—and grew to love her. I used to see her there constantly. It was by pure accident that I discovered that she was employed as governess in a family in Regent's Park. I happened to be walking through the Park one day and met her, I believe, with one of your children?"

"My eldest daughter, Georgina Alberta, sir," said Mrs. Willoughby, rapping out the words like a postman's double knock.

"I will not deny," continued Rivington, "that I have twice seen Miss de St. Evreux—alone. I—I invited her to inspect the collection of the Zoological Society in my company. We spent, perhaps, two hours in the Gardens on each occasion. Nor will I deny that I had arranged to meet her there again—to-morrow. And now, Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, I will tell you the last that I can tell. It was my intention, when I met Miss de St. Evreux to-morrow, to ask her to become my wife. For I can tell you, what I may, perhaps, never be able to tell her, that I love and honor her with my whole heart! If I seemed strange to-night when you entered it was because I had just received the news of her—what shall we call it?—flight?—abduction?—disap-

pearance?—and that my heart was bleeding and my brain whirling, because I had lost the woman I love with such devotion.”

Mr. Willoughby, who during this speech had sat with inflexible mouth and wide-opened eyes staring at the speaker, now suddenly shot out his arms, flapped them vigorously against his sides, and making a sudden dart at Rivington seized his right hand and shook it vigorously. Then pulling a large bandanna handkerchief from his overcoat pocket he blew his nose very vigorously and fell to polishing his spectacles.

“God bless my soul, sir!” said Mr. Willoughby. “God—bless—my—soul! Sir, I beg your pardon. Sir, I beg your pardon most humbly for Mrs. Wisden Willoughby and self. Sir, you will understand how easily one may be deceived. The unthinking remarks of a child, the suspicious sayings of a servant, the finding of a few words on a scrap of paper—one thing, sir, leads on to another, until innocent parties are suspected. Sir, I believe you are an honorable gentleman. Marriage, do you hear, Maria, do you hear? It was this young gentleman’s earnest desire to marry Mamzel! Do you hear that, ma’am, do you?”

“And here,” said Rivington, smiling at Wells, “is an old school friend of mine—Lieutenant

Wells, of the Royal Navy—whom I had designed for the office of best man, and——”

“I say, old chap,” said Wells, when he and Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby had shaken hands, “if you’d tell Etheredge to give us something to drink and to hand cigars to Mr. Willoughby, don’t you think we might employ our time to better advantage by talking over what’s to be done about Miss de St. Evreux? If she’s to be found, you know——”

“She must be found,” muttered Rivington, as he helped Etheredge to provide his unlooked-for visitors with refreshment. “She shall be found—I will move heaven and earth to find her!”

“Well, but you know, dear old man, you’ll have to have something to go on,” urged Wells. “This world’s a big place, after all. Why not get at the bottom of the mystery of her disappearance, if you can? Where’s she gone and what’s she gone for? People don’t go off in that sudden fashion without some cause, you know.”

“Sir,” said Mr. Willoughby, “you are quite right. Sir, your discernment and penetration do you great credit. Mr. Rivington, this infern—this deplorable business must be inquired into. We loved Mamzel de St. Evreux as if she had

been our own, and that she should disappear in this fashion from the roof which had so gladly sheltered her—— But I am a tender-hearted man, gentlemen, and shall say no more. Maria, my dear, tell Mr. Rivington what you know.”

“But I know so little, Wisden, my love,” said Mrs. Willoughby. “Everything was all right this morning until half-past nine o’clock when Mamzel came to me and asked if she might go out for an hour or two on particular business. I did not notice anything unusual in her manner; she seemed quite calm and collected. But she did not return at noon, nor during the afternoon, and we had heard nothing of her by the time Mr. Willoughby came home from the City. Then came a telegram—here it is—saying that she had left England forever.”

“Had left?” exclaimed Rivington. “Had left?”

“Had left,” repeated Mrs. Willoughby. “Had left England forever and thanking us most warmly for all our goodness to her, and sending her sincere love to all——”

“And therefore, sir,” broke in Mr. Willoughby, “we began the inquiries which led us to your door, where, I am glad to say, we have been received frankly and honestly and in a

manly fashion. Sir, my daughter had seen you speak to Mamzel—a parlormaid had seen you with Mamzel at the Zoo—finally, Miss Latouche, a friend of Mamzel’s, told us who you were and where you lived. We came—we are satisfied. And now, sir, what is the next thing to be done?”

Rivington was studying the telegram which Mr. Willoughby had put into his hand. His brows were working and his eyes moody.

“She says, ‘I have left England,’” he muttered. “And yet this was not dispatched from the West Central Head Office until half-past five. Strange! Well, Mr. Willoughby, it is just possible I may be able to give some news of Miss de St. Evreux to-night. I am going to see Madame de Marlé, under whose roof I first met her. To-morrow I may have something to tell you. Till then——”

Rivington went with his visitors to the outer door. Coming back, he took Wells by the arm.

“Dogger!” he said, “are you going in with me in this—right through?”

“Right through, Daubs,” answered Wells. “As far as ever it goes.”

“Then come on!” said Rivington. “We’re for Paradise Court. Etheredge—a hansom!”

Chapter III

THE LIGHT IN THE TURRET WINDOW

As THEY got into the cab which Etheredge had in readiness for them at the Burlington Gardens end of the entrance to the Albany, Rivington turned to his man and spoke in a low voice:

"It's quite possible, Etheredge," he said, "that I shall leave for the Continent to-morrow morning, so you had better get things ready. If I go, I shall want you to go with me. Until I return from Madame de Marlé's, I can't say anything definite, but as we may go and may be pressed for time——"

"I understand perfectly, sir," answered Etheredge. He closed the door of the hansom upon Rivington and his companion and turned to the driver. "Go up Tottenham Court Road until you are told to stop," he said.

As the horse fell into the peculiar jog-trot so characteristic of London cab horses, Rivington drew out a cigarette case.

"Smoke, Dogger, smoke!" he said. "There's

nothing like tobacco for helping one to think. And we've got to think—to think pretty hard!"

"There are things I should like to know," said Wells slowly, after he had lighted a ciagrette. "You must remember, Daubs, I'm all in the dark. Except for the fact that I know now that there is a Miss Yvette de St. Evreux, that you're madly in love with her and want to marry her, that she has been a governess in the family of Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, whom we have just seen, and that she has disappeared suddenly and in a most unaccountable manner, I am as much at sea as if I'd been cast adrift in the Pacific! Tell something more as we trot along. For example—has Miss de St. Evreux no friends, no relations, no family? Must have, you know, old chap—somewhere. And who's this Madame de Marlé that we're bowling off to see? Bit late at night to call, isn't it?—it's close on twelve now."

Rivington laughed.

"Not too late for Madame de Marlé," he said. "I've often wondered whether Madame ever goes to bed. She's a woman of tireless energy and usually most brilliant about two o'clock in the morning. Madame is—but you want explanations, Dogger, don't you? Well, suppose I begin at the beginning—there's a good deal of personal

history mixed up in this. And to be sure I haven't had much time to tell you anything—we were going to have a good talk, weren't we, when this came. And yet I mustn't weary you with detail, and I'm so bothered and troubled that it is difficult to think clearly about anything, but——”

“Spin us a short yarn full of main points,” counseled Wells. “Just the outlines of the thing.”

Rivington drummed his fingers on the door of the hansom. It was not so easy for him to compress a story into a few words as Wells seemed to think it might be. His way was to tell a story if anything from its very beginning, to start it out from origins, which, absolutely uninteresting to the hearer, were yet so full of keen interest to him that to leave them out was to emasculate the thing, to rob it of most of its charm, of its vigor, its vital importance. Now, as he sat by Wells's side, half smiling, he was seeing the possibilities of the story which he had to tell, seeing the latent activity in it, realizing how, were it only fiction, a subtle hand could weave things into it and evolve things out of it, and throw all over it a glamour, an atmosphere. A short yarn full of main points? That might be the method of legal folk, for of what were com-

monly called hard-headed, common-sense folk, but so far it had not been his who had trained himself all his life to wrap up even ordinary things in a gauze-like veil of romance, and could always see at least half a dozen ways in which any fact or truth might be understood, even as there are a hundred points of view from which one may gaze upon and realize such a fact as, say, the Venus of the Capitol.

"Let's have the hang of it, Daubs," repeated Wells.

"I should have to go back a long way," began Rivington dreamily. "You remember, Dogger, that it was my ambition to become a great painter?"

"I remember that you used to make a most awful mess with your painting things," said Wells ungallantly. "But what's that got to do with——"

"I get muddled if I don't tell things in my own way," said Rivington. "Besides, this is apropos of what I am going to tell you. After I came down from Oxford I did try to do something in painting—and worked very hard. And then I realized, perhaps a little slowly, that after all I was not cut out for the life and course I had dreamed of—that it wasn't in me to achieve it.

I had all the desire, the wish, the ambition, but I hadn't the inborn power, without which the other things were valueless. It was just about that time that Uncle Gervase died and left me a hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

Wells groaned deeply and said something under his breath.

"Yes, I know I was lucky," continued Rivington. "And yet I believe I'd rather have been a great painter. However, I said to myself, 'If I can't be a master in art, I can enjoy art—if I can't create great things myself I can derive infinite pleasure from the work of those who can, and what's more I can help people who can do what I can't do, and who are not so well off in this world's goods as I fortunately am.' Do you understand, Dogger?"

"Perfectly—sort of Mæcenas business, eh?" answered Wells.

"Scarcely anything so important," said Rivington. "However, all this leads on. There was a man—no, little more than a boy—whom I was able to help a good deal some eighteen months ago. He is a young Neapolitan, Carlo Marini, full of genius and promise, but, when I met him, desperately poor. I bought some of his work—you shall see it—and got others to buy it. He

has a studio now, Master Carlo, and is doing well and will do better. It was through him that I became acquainted with Madame de Marlé."

Wells lighted a fresh cigarette with a feeling of relief. Now they were getting to something like business. The name of Madame de Marlé was by this time quite familiar.

"Carlo Marini," resumed Rivington, "knows a good deal of the underworld of art, music, letters. One day, some nine months ago, he asked me if I knew Madame de Marlé. I answered that I had never even heard of Madame de Marlé. Then he told me that this lady was one of great accomplishments; that she herself was a professor of the art of pianoforte playing, but cherished a vast regard for art in all its forms, that she was immensely fond of the society of clever young people, and had a salon every Sunday, whereat she was always pleased to see her friends. There was good talk there, said Master Carlo, of music and books and paintings—would I like to go? Of course I replied that I would, and a few days afterward I received a card from Madame de Marlé. On the following Sunday I went—to find myself one of a crowd of young people about my own age."

"Lots of chaps with long hair and girls in

green-and-yellow gowns, I suppose?" interjected Wells. "I know, old chap!—once went to one of that sort of do's with a cousin. Awful business! Never mind—awfully sorry—go on, Daubs—full speed ahead."

"Well, I suppose there were some men whose hair was a bit long," said Rivington, "but I never met any young women there who were dressed in any exceptional style. In fact, my dear Dogger, it was a very ordinary sort of business, so far as outward appearances went. Everybody was clothed and in his or her right mind. There were tea and coffee and cakes and things, and conversation—very good—and music, and Madame de Marlé impressed me as being a remarkably kind, clever, shrewd woman of the world, who liked to see talented young folk——"

"Were they all talented—eh?" asked Wells. "By Gad!—what a crush!"

"Oh, well, we won't quibble about words! What I mean," said Rivington, "is that here was a painter and there a poet; here a promising young actress and there a coming violinist—you know what I mean—all young folk who had done something or were going to do something."

"Awful mistake," said Wells. "Far apart as sheep from goats, I should think, those two lots.

Didn't the Have-Done-Somethings turn up their noses at the Going-to-Be's?"

"Well, well!" laughed Rivington. "Never mind—we can't all be admirals straight off, you know. But let me get on with my story. It was at Madame de Marlé's that I met Miss de St. Evreux. I had been there twice, then, for I found the place and people interesting. Miss de St. Evreux had not been there on the occasion of my previous visits, but I soon found that she was a *habituée*—had been so for some time. There were a great many people—perhaps twenty-five or thirty—in Madame de Marlé's room that evening, and my attention was first attracted to Miss de St. Evreux by her voice. Madame de Marlé and I were in conversation, discussing some point in connection with our joint protégé, Carlo Marini, when a girl's voice—a beautiful, clear, true soprano—suddenly broke in upon us. I was entranced, and showed it. 'Ah, that!' said Madame, 'that is Yvette de St. Evreux. She has not been to see me for three Sundays. She is singing her best to atone to me for her naughtiness.' And later I was presented to Miss de St. Evreux—and I fell in love with her."

"Look here, Daubs, old chap," said Wells. "You're an awfully clever chap at slinging words

together, even if you can't paint pictures. Just describe Miss de St. Evreux, won't you? Pen portrait—word portrait—what do you call it? You know."

Rivington laughed gently.

"You ask much, dear, dear boy!" he said. "Well—she is—no, she is not tall—she is nearly—very nearly tall. She is slender—and yet I do not like the term willowy—it reminds me of the blades of cricket bats rather than of something supple and graceful. Her figure is as near perfection as a woman's can be. She is dark as—no, I shall not say as dark as night—I shall content myself by saying that her hair and her eyes are mystifyingly dark—ah, I have it!—the darkness of a clear night in spring. She is full of grace—her features are regular—she is pretty, beautiful, and handsome all at once. Moreover, she has wit, spirit, and a most enviable quality of frank candor. In everything that I have seen of her she is sweet, modest, womanly."

"A prize not to be lost sight of," said Wells laconically.

"Exactly. I do not intend to lose her," agreed Rivington. "I shall never be happy again if I do. But I won't lose her, Dogger! However, I

was telling you—I fell in love with Miss de St. Evreux at first sight. Every Sunday after that I attended Madame de Marlé's receptions regularly—I never missed one. I endeavored, without, of course, attracting undue attention, to cultivate the society of Miss de St. Evreux as much as I could. I knew little of her: it is tacitly understood at Madame de Marlé's that private affairs are not talked of. There one meets other people, not to talk of one's self, but of things outside one's self—but I gathered from a chance word which she uttered in my presence one day that she was a governess. I wondered a little at that, because of all the women there she was always the most perfectly, the most daintily gowned, and governesses are not usually supposed to be too well paid. However, I came to the conclusion that she might be governess in some very wealthy family. I confess all that mattered nothing to me. Had she gone in rags, like Cophetua's beggarmaid, she would have been as lovely. But the question was solved accidentally. I met her, as I say, by accident, walking in Regent's Park one morning in company with a child of nine or ten years. Of course I spoke to her—we conversed a little. The next time I met her at Madame de Marlé's, she told me that she

was a governess in a family in that neighborhood, but told me no more. It was only after some little time that she consented to visit the Zoological Gardens in my company. We have been there twice. I made no attempt to conceal my affection and admiration. We were to have met there to-morrow once more—and it was my intention then to ask her to marry me. That, my dear boy, is all I can tell you.”

The hansom had now come to a halt among the press of traffic at the Oxford Street end of Tottenham Court Road, and Rivington, who seemed desirous of action and motion, bade Wells dismount, saying that Madame de Marlé’s place was only a few minutes’ walk away and that they could reach it while the cab was getting free of the jam. He presently drew his companion out of the main road into a side street, from which they turned into another—a quiet street, ill lighted, the houses on one side of which appeared to be in course of demolition.

“They are pulling everything down hereabouts and building huge barracks of flats,” murmured Rivington as they strode along. “It is in one of those said barracks of flats that Madame de Marlé has her abode—Paradise Court, as she calls it.”

"Why Paradise Court, of all names?" inquired Wells.

"Either a mere whim on the part of Madame, or because it is the last thing between earth and heaven—a sort of courtyard to paradise," answered Rivington. "Madame's flat is 'way up,' as our American friends would say—it is on the very top of the building. She would have it so for the fresh air."

At the head of the street they crossed another at the end of which, bulking vast and massive against the midnight sky, rose a huge building in the myriad windows of which were many lights. Rivington suddenly paused and, laying his hand on Wells's arm, pointed upward.

"You see that light, right at the top, Dogger?" he said. "That curiously colored light, something like the glittering of an opal, yet deeper and fuller in tint—there?"

"I see it," answered Wells.

"That is Madame de Marlé's signal light. So long as it burns in the turret Madame is accessible. When Madame retires, out goes the light. The light is on—Madame is at home. Come!"

Chapter IV

PARADISE COURT

LEADING the way, and closely followed by Wells, who was by this time sure that he was already in the first stages of a rapidly developing mystery wherein there might be succeeding stages still more productive of interest, Rivington advanced to the principal entrance of the vast block of buildings which he had indicated from the end of the street. Now that this block was reached Wells perceived that it had a name, the name stood out in bold letters over the door—Minobar Mansions. Although it was already midnight there was plenty of evidence of life about this principal entrance to Minobar Mansions. As Rivington and Wells came up, two motor cars were setting down people who had evidently been to the theater—men and women in evening dress; the men handsome, well-groomed, well-to-do, the women smart, pretty, elegant in their finery. From a *coupé* brougham, which had drawn up a yard or two behind the

motors, descended a woman whom Wells immediately connected with the stage. This, he said to himself, is some actress home from her evening's engagement. There were hansoms, too, crowding up to the entrance. It seemed as if the inhabitants of Minobar Mansions had been to the theater or to supper *en masse* and were now flitting home like rooks to a rookery.

"There are a thousand souls living under this roof," said Rivington as they walked along a thickly carpeted corridor. "The old English notions of privacy are fast dying out, Dogger, and yet you can keep yourself to yourself very well indeed within these flats. Madame de Marlé's flat, for example, is a castle."

"Shouldn't care very much about living barrack-fashion, myself," said Wells. "Must meet such an awful lot of people you don't know on the stairs, I should think."

"I don't think these people trouble the stairs much," said Rivington. "Lifts are more in their line. I shouldn't like to climb the stairs to Paradise Court, anyway. One might as well climb the Monument just for exercise. Here's the lift."

The man in charge of the lift was having a busy time, as was usual with him about midnight, and some minutes elapsed before Rivington and

Wells could find a place in the moving pen which continually rose with cargoes of humanity and fell empty to swallow up more. It seemed to Wells that they climbed as high as the top of a ship's mast before the lift stopped and the attendant flung open the gates with a metallic clang. "Top floor," he said, and shut them, and sped noiselessly away into the depths below.

"This way, Dogger," said Rivington. "Follow me; we have a little way to go yet ere we reach Paradise Court."

He led the way along a corridor whereupon opened many doors; then along another whereupon opened still more; and, finally, turning to a third, pointed to a door which closed it in at the end.

"Beyond that door," he said, "lies Madame de Marlé's castle. You will see how she shuts herself off from the world."

"She's high enough above it, anyway," said Wells, who was a little out of breath because of Rivington's hurrying pace. "Glad we're there, anyway."

Rivington opened the door at the end of the corridor. It admitted to a square space, plain, unornamented, which had evidently been taken off the corridor and painted to resemble a lobby

of plain dressed stone. At the farther side of this, instead of a wall, however, was a grille of wrought ironwork of very substantial quality, which stretched from floor to ceiling and effectually shut off anything that lay behind. In the midst of this grille was an ornamental iron gate, solid and practical, and secured by a businesslike-looking lock. And over the gate, in quaintly designed letters, was the legend "Paradise Court," and beneath them in smaller letters the word "Salve."

Rivington, with his finger on the button of an electric bell, motioned Wells to look through the grille at the scene beyond. But Wells had already noticed that beyond the grille lay something of an unusual nature. He drew nearer to the gate and looked through the open spaces in the wrought ironwork. The grille shut him and Rivington off from a garden—a small garden, it was true, but still a garden—bright and gay with flowers, the scents and perfumes of which came refreshingly to their nostrils. There was something mysterious and almost uncanny in the presence of this garden in such an unlikely spot, and Wells was suddenly struck with the extraordinary quietude which hung over it. That it was open to the sky he could see—there

was the faint glimmer of stars in the half blue of the springtide midnight, and yet the roar of London came to his ears so faintly, so vaguely, as to resolve itself into no more than a drowsy murmur. Above that drowsy murmur sounded the musical tinkle of a fountain; its very sound suggested soft mosses glistening with diamond-like drops falling from lichenized rocks. This gentle singing of water seemed to be the voice of the siren in whose honor the roof garden had been made. The siren herself stood in full view—a superb female figure, nude, perfect in conception and outline, standing with outstretched and inviting arms on a pedestal that rose from a circular stretch of vivid green turf immediately before the entrance gate.

“By Gad! I say, Daubs!” exclaimed Wells. “What a remarkable place! You’re sure your Madame isn’t a witch or anything of that sort?”

“Why should she be?” laughed Rivington. “Madame is, as I told you, a lady of vast taste. She loves beauty. Pretty notion this, isn’t it? To turn the leads of a place like this into a perfect gem of a garden as an entrance to your rooms—that was a stroke of genius. But—the bell.”

He pressed the button as he spoke. Somewhere

across the garden a silvery peal of sound answered his summons.

"It's a bit mystifying, though," said Wells, as they waited. "The situation, and the scent of the flowers, and the ripple of that fountain, and the figure there. What's the lady signify, Daubs? Something classical—eh?"

"That," replied Rivington, "is the Spirit of Art holding out hands of welcome to all who worship her. That was Madame's own conception, and the sculptor is a very clever young Italian who comes here much of a Sunday. But here is Madame's manservant Fritz, and as perfect a genius in his way as my man Etheredge is in his."

There was a curiously tinted light over the garden, and by its aid Wells saw advancing toward them a tall, well-built young man in the conventional garb of the male servant, who walked with a solid, smart tread and carried himself in a singularly erect, soldierly fashion. "That chap's been drilled," said Wells to himself, and he watched Fritz narrowly as he came up to the gate. "German army, for a pony!" he said, again to himself, and he looked still more narrowly at the man's flaxen mustache, which was very fierce and aggressive, at his

square chin, steel-blue eyes, and expression of stolid resolution. "Um!" he thought, "this grows still more interesting. What shall I see next?"

"It is I, Fritz—Mr. Rivington," said the leader in this midnight expedition, as the man came up to the gate and inspected the two companions. "I am anxious to see Madame de Marlé on important business for a few minutes. Is Madame engaged?"

At the sight of Rivington's face and the sound of Rivington's voice Fritz had immediately opened the gate, opened it so swiftly and noiselessly that Wells found himself wondering how it was done, and he now drew back, waving his right hand toward the garden and bowing in most polite fashion.

"No, I do not think Madame is particularly engaged, sir," he said. "That is to say, Madame has a friend or two conversing with her, but I do not think she will have any objections to seeing you. I shall take your name to Madame, sir, at once. If you will please to follow me, gentlemen?"

He had closed the gate behind him as he spoke and now marched away toward the house, head and shoulders stiffly erect. Wells, turning,

saw that the gate was closed—had been closed as it had been opened—swiftly, noiselessly. He was wondering what the opening and closing process was as he followed the manservant and Rivington around a neatly graveled path to a door which was so arranged as to be in keeping with the garden—a door enameled in pure white and set under a classical porch around the pillars of which roses, clematis, and honeysuckle were twined. From this point, glancing around him, Wells saw that the three sides of the garden other than that fenced in by the grille were covered with foliage, and that there was not even a chimney stack to be seen from it. It struck him that the mind which could accomplish these things on a London roof was capable of a vast amount of ingenuity.

On the manservant opening the white door, Wells found himself gazing around a trim little hall, all white and red. There was a white wainscoting halfway up the walls, and a soft red paper from the wainscoting to the ceiling; the floor was laid in red and white tiles. A few old prints in dull black frames hung here and there; a couple of quaint, high-backed Flemish chairs served for furniture. But Wells had only time to glance at this in passing through. He found

himself following Rivington into a small apartment which opened off a corridor leading from the hall—an apartment tastefully and snugly furnished, and with a certain air of homeliness about it.

“If you will please to be seated, gentlemen,” said Fritz, bowing right and left to easy chairs, “I shall inform Madame that Mr. Rivington is here.”

“Stay, Fritz,” said Rivington, detaining the man. “Tell Madame,” he continued, “that Mr. Rivington and a very dear friend of his would like to see her alone for a little time on a very important matter. Tell Madame that I crave a thousand pardons for intruding upon her at this hour, but I will give her the best of reasons.”

“I shall deliver your message, sir,” said Fritz, and bowed himself out.

“Madame appears to keep up an establishment,” remarked Wells.

“A man, two maids, and a companion, who, I think, plays the part of housekeeper,” replied Rivington. “I am anxious to see what effect Madame has upon a practical young Briton like you, Dogger, old boy. I think you will see things in her that will interest—and perhaps surprise you.”

Wells was about to say that he had already seen a good deal that had both surprised and interested him, but he kept his thoughts to himself. In reality, he was wondering how it was that a fine, strapping, well-set-up fellow like the manservant Fritz, who, without a doubt, had undergone a thorough military training, should be found doing menial tasks in a place like this, where there could surely be little more than nominal work to perform. Besides, he did not look the sort of man who turns to such work as valeting, footmaning, or anything of that sort. That he was a German, in spite of his excellent English, Wells was as certain as he was of his own nationality.

Thinking these thoughts he glanced around at Rivington, who had become absorbed in an engraving at the other side of the room. He knew that Rivington from boyhood had been a dreamer, a dilettante, that with all his good nature, his kindliness of heart, his excellent qualities, he was not too well fitted to cope with the practical affairs of this world, and that in many things a child might cheat him with impunity. And he began to wonder, piecing together bit by bit the things he had heard and seen within the last hour and a half, if Rivington was not

being deceived at the present time, if he might not be the victim of some strange conspiracy. For what impression, he asked himself, his shrewd brain working rapidly, would any practical man form of what he, Wells, had already heard and seen? This Yvette de St. Evreux—what, on his own confession, did Rivington know of her? And this Madame de Marlé, whom they were, he supposed, about to see? Certainly to him, Wells, the outer walls of her castle suggested a good many thoughts. It was true, of course, that an Englishman's house was his castle, but did the ordinary Englishman, if he took a flat in the commonplace neighborhood of Bloomsbury, fence himself and it with an iron palisading and a gate which certainly locked itself in some curious fashion? Did he set up a janitor who might have been a drill sergeant? Did he——

The fiercely mustachioed Fritz returned with more bows. Madame would be delighted to see Mr. Rivington and his friend. Would the gentlemen follow him?

Rivington followed the man with the air of one who treads a well-known path; Wells, following him, took sharp observations of all he saw. It was evident to him that Paradise Court

was a flat of some considerable size. From the little entrance hall to the door to which Fritz led them, a door at the extreme end of the corridor and facing it, the distance was quite twenty-five yards. There were four doors opening out of the corridor on each side—each was closed. Everything along the corridor was in keeping with what Wells had already seen. Madame de Marlé was certainly a person of taste, and apparently of sufficient wealth to enable her to make her taste evident in her surroundings.

Opening the door at the end of the corridor Fritz ushered the two friends into an apartment of considerable size—a drawing room which Wells at once fixed upon as the scene of Madame de Marlé's Sunday receptions. It was empty of life when they entered, and Wells examined it with some curiosity. He did not know what he had expected to see. In point of fact, he saw nothing more than a large, comfortable, tastefully arranged room. There was a grand piano, there were numberless lounges, sofas, easy chairs, conversation chairs, cosy nooks and corners, there were pictures, there were flowers, there were books, magazines, newspapers—it was a bright, tasteful, pretty, but eminently homelike

room. And yet some thirty yards away that curiously locked gate.

A sudden rustle of drawn curtains, the scene of a new presence.

Wells turned sharply and found himself looking at the most remarkable woman he had ever seen in his life!

Chapter V

MADAME DE MARLÉ

THE most remarkable woman he had ever seen in his life! This dominant idea beat itself in upon Wells's consciousness with sledge-hammer-like blows during the moments which immediately succeeded Madame de Marlé's entrance. Something seemed to confuse him. He was vaguely aware that Rivington presented him to Madame with all due formality; that Madame smiled graciously and spoke graciously; that they were all presently seated, and that Rivington was apologizing for the lateness of his visit. He was much more aware, however, that he was staring with all his eyes, and in spite of himself, at the mistress of Paradise Court. And deep down, far under this mere surface inspection, he was realizing that it was not just Madame's exterior presentment of herself which made her remarkable, but something which could neither be seen nor touched, but *felt*.

Madame de Marlé was neither a handsome nor a beautiful woman in the strict meaning of these

terms. She was tall, of an excellent and well-preserved figure; she had much dignity and grace, and was gowned in perfect, if quiet, taste. It was difficult to make an accurate calculation of her age. Her complexion, obviously natural, was pink and fresh as a girl's, but her hair, of which she had great masses piled high above a well-shaped, well-carried head, was snow-white. The clearness of her complexion, the snowy whiteness of her hair, served to accentuate the blackness of her large eyes. It was these eyes, so large, so dark—black with the blackness of pure jet—so penetrating, so quick, so subtle, and withal so commanding, that enchained Wells's faculties of observation. He had a direct fashion of staring straight at people when he spoke to them, and for the second or two he and Madame had looked into each other's eyes as they were introduced, it seemed to him that hers were the sort that could see into the niches and crannies of the human brain or even wither a less mentally endowed being with one swift look. Those black eyes under those level, unruffled brows and that mass of snow-white hair! Certainly he had never seen so remarkable a woman in his life.

“ . . . for indeed, Madame de Marlé, I cannot

think of anyone but you who can give me any help or information," Rivington was saying when Wells came out of his abstraction and found that they were all three sitting in close proximity—the lady on a lounge near the hearth and her visitors in chairs opposite her. "If you can tell me nothing, I do not know where I shall go!"

"But what is it that you wish my help in—what information do you seek, my friend?" inquired Madame de Marlé. "Ah! I begin to know you, Mr. Rivington. You have a story to tell and must tell it in your own way."

She possessed a remarkably sweet, telling voice—a voice which sounded more like that of a young woman than of a presumably middle-aged one. It was clear, silvery, with a liquid note in it, but it was also full and commanding and imperative.

"What story I have to tell, Madame," replied Rivington, "can be left until afterward. I came here to-night to ask you if you can tell me anything—if you know anything of Miss de St. Evreux."

"Of Yvette de St. Evreux? But in what way, Mr. Rivington? Your question is too vague."

"Then I will try to make matters plain, Madame de Marlé. Miss de St. Evreux has quite

suddenly left London—left England. She quitted her employer's house early this—no, I mean yesterday—morning, making the excuse that she wished to go out on business for an hour or two. She never returned. Late in the evening Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby received a telegram which informed them that Miss de St. Evreux had left England. Still later I received a letter from her to the same effect.”

“You received a letter?”

“I, Madame. Here it is.”

“But why should you receive a letter from Yvette de St. Evreux? You had, I think, only met her—here—a few times?”

“A great many times, Madame de Marlé, during the past few months—thanks to your kindness and hospitality. And——”

“Ah, you have been meeting her elsewhere! Well, well, it cannot of course be helped, but do you know, Mr. Rivington, the last thing I wish is that love affairs should spring out of my little Sunday evening parties. They are so embarrassing and discomposing, those love affairs, and give so much trouble to more than the people most closely connected with them.”

“Did I say anything of a love affair, Madame?”

"A great deal, my friend, though not in words. Do you think I have no eyes? And so you are really in love with Yvette de St. Evreux? How romantic, and how very English! Do you know anything of her, Mr. Rivington?"

"Madame de Marlé, I know little of Miss de St. Evreux. How should I?"

"Exactly."

"All that I know is——"

"That you love her, eh? A good capital to begin working upon, Mr. Rivington, of course, but I always understood that here, in your cold England, where respectability and convention govern things so largely, it is a recognized thing that young gentlemen do not fall in love until the object of their passion has established her right to be considered—what shall we say? I leave you to find the word, for indeed I don't know of one."

Rivington's brows drew themselves together. He glanced uneasily from Madame de Marlé to Wells. That ingenuous young gentleman, with vacuous face and innocent eyes, was steadily regarding a plaster cast of Psyche which stood on a pedestal at his elbow.

"Madame," said Rivington, "you will perhaps understand better what I mean, and what

I feel, when I tell you, on my honor as a gentleman, that I love Miss de St. Evreux with all my heart and soul, and that it was my intention to ask her, this very day, to become my wife."

In the silence which immediately followed this confession Wells, looking slowly round, saw that Madame de Marlé was genuinely astonished. She was gazing at Rivington as if she could scarcely comprehend what he had said, and for a moment a certain hardness which was in the bright black eyes went out of them.

"I am very sorry for you, Mr. Rivington," she said. "But—you say that Yvette de St Evreux has suddenly left England?"

"Here is her letter, Madame de Marlé," answered Rivington. "If you will do me the kindness to read it——"

Madame de Marlé took the letter from Rivington's hand and bent over it. Within a moment she handed it back.

"Yes," she said. "That is quite clear. But how can I help you, Mr. Rivington? I am not in Miss de St. Evreux's confidence."

"Can you tell me nothing, Madame?"

"Little more than you already know. You must remember, Mr. Rivington, that a great

many young people come to my Sunday receptions of whom I really know very, very little indeed. I can tell you how Miss de St. Evreux first came. As you are aware, I am a teacher of the pianoforte with a most excellent connection. Because of that I meet a great many members of my own profession and the kindred professions. I chanced to hear Miss de St. Evreux sing one afternoon at a friend's house, and hearing that she was governess in an English family, and knowing what a very *triste* life that is in most cases, I invited her to come to me on Sundays whenever she liked. She came—she was charming—she sang delightfully—that is all. Who she is I do not know. She might be a Russian princess for aught I could tell you to the contrary. Why, so little do I care about the private affairs of my guests—my general guests—that I was not even aware that Miss de St. Evreux was domiciled with the respectable Willoughbys whom you have just mentioned. No, I cannot tell you anything, Mr. Rivington.”

“Madame,” said Rivington, “why should she leave England so suddenly—with such short notice to me? For I am sure she knew what was in my mind.”

Madame de Marlé turned an astonished face

upon her questioner. Then she laughed—a peal of silvery laughter which voiced incredulous surprise.

“My friend,” she exclaimed, “you must be truly idyllic in your simplicity if you do not see that you yourself have just supplied an excellent reason for Miss de St. Evreux’s sudden departure. You say that you are sure she knew what was in your mind—well, perhaps she ran away to avoid a declaration.”

“Why should she do that?” asked Rivington, frowning.

Madame spread out her delicate hands.

“Who can tell what is in a woman’s mind?” she said. “It may have been that it would have proved inconvenient. It may have been that she did not choose to hear it. It may have been that——”

“No!” interrupted Rivington stoutly. “Forgive me, Madame de Marlé, but it could not have been any of these things. As you inferred just now, I have met Miss de St. Evreux—though only twice—and I am certain that the reason of her sudden departure from England is not to be found in anything that I have said or was about to say. I would stake my life that Miss de St. Evreux had no idea until yesterday

morning that she was about to leave London so suddenly. But that there is someone in London who is aware of her departure and could give some reason for it I am certain."

Madame de Marlé showed renewed interest.

"Yes? Why, Mr. Rivington?"

"Because in the telegram received by the Willoughbys she uses the words, 'I have left London,' and yet that telegram was not dispatched from the West Central Head Office until very late in the afternoon. She must have handed the form to some friend with a request that it should be wired at some specified time."

"I do not follow," said Madame de Marlé. "Indeed, you have shown me no proof as yet that Miss de St. Evreux has left England. For anything I know to the contrary—and I only know what you tell me, Mr. Rivington—Miss de St. Evreux is as much in London as we three are."

"But her letter—her letter to me, Madame!"

Madame de Marlé rose, smiling.

"Never attach too much importance to a woman's letter, my friend," she said. "I should attach none to that, nor to the telegram received by the respectable Willoughbys. It is possible that for reasons of her own, with which no one

else—no, not even an impetuous lover like yourself!—has anything to do, Miss de St. Evreux desires to remain *perdu* for a time. Just now, while we are agitating ourselves about her, she is probably enjoying her beauty sleep within a mile of me. Who can tell?”

“But this is a matter of the most serious moment to me, Madame de Marlé,” said Rivington, with some show of impatience.

“Oh, I am not jesting, I assure you, my dear friend,” answered Madame de Marlé, reassuringly. “I am merely endeavoring to keep a cool head. As things are, I say there is no proof that Miss de St. Evreux has left the shores of this country, or even left London, though it is quite evident she has quitted her employer’s house.”

“I believe her letter,” said Rivington stubbornly.

Madame de Marlé sighed.

“Precisely,” she answered. “You were certain to do that. Well, then, what do you propose to do, my friend?”

“I had hoped that you would have been able to give me some information about Miss de St. Evreux,” said Rivington. “She must have friends, relations——”

Madame de Marlé laid a hand on his arm.

“My dear friend,” she said, “if you had seen so much of life as I have, you would know that in great capitals we come across a vast number of young people who appear to have neither relations nor friends. I myself, when I was much younger, mixed largely with young people in more than one great city, without even becoming intimate with them. If I were to put all the young men and young women who attend my Sunday receptions through a form of examination such as: Who are your parents?—what is your father?—where do they live?—how much money have you?—I should ruin everything—especially my own serenity of mind. Now, for example, how much do I know of you? Little more than that you are a most amiable young Englishman, well disposed toward art and artists, and wealthy enough to patronize promising men like Carlo Marini—who, my friend, will do your penetration justice, for he will be a great man. But apart from that I don’t know you. I certainly do not know whether your father was a wine merchant or a man of quality, a pork butcher or a peer. I take my Sunday guests as I find them—of their private affairs I know nothing. Therefore, I know nothing of the private affairs of Yvette de St. Evreux.”

Rivington rose. Wells rose with him. Madame de Marlé rose, too. She stood looking at Rivington with a slight smile.

"I am sorry that I am powerless to help you, Mr. Rivington," she said. "But—you see?"

Rivington bowed.

"I am sorry, too, Madame de Marlé," he said gently, "because I must find her. And I shall find her. You will forgive me for this intrusion, knowing what I feel?"

She smiled and gave him her hand—turned from him and gave her hand to Wells. It seemed to Wells that she searched his face narrowly for a brief instant—then, with an inclination of the head to both, she was gone. Fritz appeared at the door.

Outside Minobar Mansions Rivington looked at his watch.

"Twelve twenty-five," he said. "Come along, Dogger, the night's young. We are going to Cumberland Terrace. And if Mr. Wisden Willoughby is in his bed he'll have to get out of it!"

Chapter VI

NEWS

WELLS recognized very clearly that Rivington was in a mood which would brook no denial and no delay, and he followed him into the first hansom that hove in sight without so much as a question or a protest. After all, it was best, he said to himself, to let Rivington have his own way entirely at that juncture. Balked of it, he would fret and fume all night.

"This chap will run us round to Cumberland Terrace in under ten minutes," said Rivington, as the hansom crossed Tottenham Court Road and sped along Howland Street in the direction of Fitzroy Square. "It's only round the corner. I must have some information from old Willoughby and his wife. I thought I should have got at least something to go upon from Madame de Marlé."

"Are you sure you didn't, Daubs?" asked Wells, drawing out a cigar case and offering it to Rivington. "Have a cigar—it'll do you good."

Rivington took a cigar and turned an astonished face upon his friend.

"Am I sure that I didn't, Dogger?" he said. "Why, what did I get out of Madame but positive negations? It was 'No' all along."

"Not so sure of that either," answered Wells. "If you want my honest opinion, I don't trust Madame de Marlé."

Rivington laughed.

"You—don't—trust—Madame de Marlé!" he exclaimed. "Why, what——"

"I wouldn't trust her as far as I could throw her with one hand," answered Wells, "which is about a foot."

Rivington gasped.

"Dear me, Dogger!" he said. "You surprise me. Now, Madame has always struck me as being one of the most candid, outspoken persons that one could possibly meet. You saw to-night how plainly she answered my questions. I am convinced that had she been able to give me any information concerning Miss de St. Evreux she would have done so. But, as she implied, it would be preposterous to expect her to know all the private affairs of the people who attend her Sunday receptions. Why do you not trust Madame de Marlé?"

“Because I don’t—that’s why!” replied Wells. “State of natural antipathy, I suppose. Never mind that. What are you going to do at the old City johnny’s?—more questions?”

“I want to know what they know of Miss de St. Evreux,” answered Rivington slowly and thoughtfully. “I want to know where she came from to them—what references she gave—what her habits were. There must be some clue that one can lay hold of. For I shall find her, Dogger, I shall find her!”

“You don’t think, old chap, that considering you have no—no right—eh—you know, to—to act on Miss de St. Evreux’s behalf, that she wouldn’t perhaps resent this—eh—interference with her affairs, if she came to know of it?” inquired Wells.

“When a man is as much in love as I am,” answered Rivington, “he’s not very likely to stick at small things like that. I want to know where she is, and I will know, and if there’s any explaining to be done, I’ll do it later on. How do I know that she isn’t in danger? And if a woman’s in danger, and the man who loves her knows it, and moves heaven and earth to free her of the danger, do you think she’s going to say much about it in the wrong way?”

"I can't gainsay that," answered Wells. "It's a queer business. I wish there was a bit of straight work in it—something you could get your hands up to, you know—no hole-and-corner work. You know, Daubs, you're not a bit the better for going to the lady who fastens herself behind iron bars; it would take a good deal to get anything out of her, even if she did know anything. By the by, what *does* she want to barricade herself in like that for? And again, why does she employ a man who has obviously gone through his training in the German army as a footman?"

"Oh, as to the grille and the gate and the garden, mere whim, mere caprice!" said Rivington. "And really, you can't deny that the garden is a beautiful thought made into an equally charming fact. As for Fritz—well, there are said to be thirty thousand men who have gone through their training in the German army, here in London following various avocations. Fritz is a quiet, peaceful, well-behaved fellow. Why should he not earn his living as Madame's footman? Since she must have one, why not he?"

"I should have thought a boy in buttons or a neat parlormaid would have done," answered Wells. "But I'll agree with you, Daubs, old

chap: Madame is a woman of whim and caprice. I wonder what the secret of that lock is?"

He uttered the last sentence in a very low aside, and Rivington did not catch it. Before he had time to ask Wells what he was talking about the cab turned into Cumberland Terrace from the Outer Circle and stopped in front of Mr. Wisden Willoughby's mansion.

Mr. Wisden Willoughby had presumably not yet retired to rest. There were lights in his windows upstairs and downstairs, and when a very sleepy-looking young footman opened the door in surprise to Rivington's urgent knock the master of the house himself was seen hovering in his rear, habited, it is true, in a much-beflowered dressing gown, but evidently quite wide awake. At the sound of Rivington's voice he came forward with outstretched hand.

"Come in, my dear sir, come in!" he said in grave, hushed accents. "And you also, my dear young gentleman. To tell you the truth, Mr. Rivington, I am not at all surprised to see you. I said to Mrs. Wisden Willoughby just now, 'Maria,' I said, 'I shall not be at all surprised if Mr. Rivington should call to-night. If he has momentous news, Maria,' I said, 'I am sure that

he will not sleep until he has communicated it to us.' This way, this way, gentlemen."

Having requested the sleepy-looking young footman to tell the cabman to wait, Rivington, followed by Wells, trod upon Mr. Willoughby's tracks into a heavily furnished dining room, from the walls of which several generations of Willoughbys looked down upon solid mahogany, thick carpets, and a massive sideboard. At a sign and a word from his master the footman—who had poked his nose into the room out of sheer curiosity, something within him strongly insisting that these two young swells were in reality detectives from Scotland Yard—placed a solid-looking spirit case on the table and flanked it with tumblers and siphons. Mr. Willoughby waved a hospitable hand.

"Not a word, my dear sir, not a word until you have partaken of refreshment," he said solemnly. "I am aware, gentlemen, of the terribly harassing nature of these inquiries—I have not been so upset for years as I have to-day—you may go, Bassett—never, indeed, gentlemen, so upset since a certain crisis in the City years ago. But that, of course——Help yourselves, help yourselves, gentlemen, I beg."

More to please this worthy gentleman than because they particularly desired it, Rivington and Wells helped themselves to a drink. Mr. Willoughby—who, it appeared, had just helped himself at the time of their arrival—looking solemnly on until they had raised their glasses to their lips and set them down again. Then, and not till then, and then with a hushed voice, he asked:

“And what news have we, sir, of our unfortunate affair? It is, I trust, good—I earnestly trust it is good, Mr. Rivington. Feeling as I do that I stand *in loco parentis* to Mamzel de St. Evreux——”

“I am sorry to say that I have no news at all, Mr. Willoughby,” said Rivington, interrupting his host’s eloquence. “Madame de Marlé, from whom I have just come, can tell us nothing that we do not know. She only knows Miss de St. Evreux as an acquaintance—nothing more. Of her private affairs she is in total ignorance. And so I drove round here to ask you and Mrs. Willoughby to give me some further information. You, at any rate, can tell me when and under what circumstances Miss de St. Evreux came to you—with what references—perhaps you may know other things. Tell me, I beg you, what you can!”

Mr. Willoughby, who had listened to this with his head on one side and his thumbs twirling one over the other like the sails of windmills, now sat up erect and assumed the air of a righteous man who goes into a witness box well content to speak the truth.

“Sir,” he said, “whatever information it is in my power to give I shall not withhold. Sir, I regret that Mrs. Wisden Willoughby has now retired to much-needed rest, but I believe that whatever information Mrs. Wisden Willoughby could have given you I can give. Sir, I shall begin from the beginning. I beg you be seated, gentlemen. Sir, it is now some eighteen months ago that my wife and myself, after due consideration of the matter, decided that it was our duty to our progeny, which consists, I may say, of two daughters and one son, aged respectively eleven, nine, and seven, to afford them the advantages which must necessarily spring from the care and tuition of a first-class French governess. Following the advice of friends we advertised for such a young lady in the *Morning Post* of London and in the *Tawmps* of Parry. Our advertisement in the *Tawmps* produced various communications. I need only refer to one. It was from Mamzel Yvette de St. Evreux. It was

accompanied by the very highest testimonials—one from the Reverend Mother of the Convent of Notre Dame at Courbevoie, just outside Paris, where Mamzel had been educated; another from the Dowager Lady Firmdene, whose daughter Mamzel had perfected in the French language during their two years' residence in Paris, where their lady mother has an appartymong in the district of Passy, and one from the Abbé Gournay, a well-known clergyman of that famous city. On the strength of these testimonials we engaged Mamzel de St. Evreux—and we have never regretted it."

Rivington, who had made a note of these names and places, breathed a sigh of relief.

"You do not know anything of Miss de St. Evreux's friends?" he asked. "Did she ever speak of her relations, her family?"

"Sir," replied Mr. Willoughby, "I have always understood, in company with Mrs. Wisden Willoughby, that Mamzel de St. Evreux was an orphan and had been brought up at the convent in Beauvais as such. The Reverend Mother Jupuin, sir, at that highly respectable religious establishment, would no doubt be able to afford information on this point."

"I shall see the Reverend Mother to-morrow,"

said Rivington quietly. "One more question, Mr. Willoughby. We all know that Miss de St. Evreux used to spend her Sunday evenings at Madame de Marlé's. Did she go out at any other time—as a regular thing?"

"Sir," replied Mr. Willoughby, "every Wednesday evening from four o'clock until eleven, or when she, in her discretion, chose to return, was at Mamzel de St. Evreux's entire disposal. She usually went out in the evenings at six and returned at ten. She always went forth on foot, but returned in a hansom: I believe she was fond of the play. You will understand, gentlemen, that Mamzel was not short of money. Mamzel's stipend in this house, gentlemen, was one hundred pounds per annum. In addition to which, sir, there were little gifts on such occasions as Christmas, her birthday, and so forth."

"I am sure you have been most good and kind to Miss de St. Evreux," said Rivington.

Mr. Willoughby inclined his head.

"Sir," he said, "we had come to look upon Mamzel de St. Evreux as one of the Wisden Willoughbys!"

A few minutes later Rivington and Wells left the Cumberland Terrace mansion and drove away.

"Well, we've hit upon something at last!" said Rivington, with a sigh of relief. "I shall go across to Normandy to-morrow, Dogger. I'll begin at the beginning, the sisters at the convent will be able to tell me more, and perhaps I can build up something gradually. Will you come, dear old boy? Normandy will look well just now."

"I'll come, Daubs," answered Wells. "I said I'd see you through."

"Let's get out and walk," said Rivington, as they rattled down Portland Place into Regent Street. "Now that I know something I want to think, and I can't think in a hansom. Tumble out, Dogger, and stretch your legs."

Walking arm in arm along the now almost deserted thoroughfare, the two friends paced smartly along until they came to the corner of Vigo Street. And there, underneath a lamppost, they almost ran down a little man in a flowing cape and a big sombrero, who started back, looked up, uttered an exclamation, and removed his headgear with a courtly sweep. Rivington uttered an exclamation, too.

"Why, Carlo mio!" he said. "Is it you? I trust you have not been to see me and had the bad luck to find me out."

The artist shook his head and showed a set of beautiful white teeth in the lamplight.

"Ah, no, Signor Rivington!" he said. "No, no, I have just come from a friend. But I shall come to you very soon."

"Do. I want to see you, Marini. You have not been to Madame's lately, either."

"No, no, signor, I have been much engaged. But I shall come to Madame's, too. I wish to meet the Signorina de St. Evreux again. Ah, if she would but let me paint her! Do you think she would, Signor Rivington? I did see her to-night, and once I thought, 'Now I will ask her,' and then I thought, 'No, no, she is hurried, bothered, I shall ask her at her leisure, when she returns, not now.' But if she would but sit to me—ah!"

Wells winced under the grip which Rivington fixed upon his arm. But Rivington's voice was cool enough when he spoke.

"I have no doubt Miss de St. Evreux would sit for you, Carlo mio," he said kindly. "You saw her to-night, you say. Where was that?"

"Oh, at Victoria Station, signor, all bustle and push and hurry about. Me, I could not explain to a young lady what I did want, eh? Besides, she was in a great hurry herself to catch the boat

train for Paris. My friend and I, we were seeing a compatriot off by the same train, the Signorina de St. Evreux, she pass us close by. Ah, what grace, what a shape! When she returns I shall crave my humblest, my most persuadingest, that she honor me with but just one, two, three little sittings. I have an idea, grand, magnificent!"

"Well, I've no doubt she will, Carlo amico. But come to see me soon, then we shall talk. Till we meet again, Carlo!"

Once round the corner of Vigo Street Rivington uttered a sharp cry and broke into a run. He dashed along the street, startled the astonished porter at the entrance to the Albany, and once through the lodge door, darted madly for his rooms, where he woke Etheredge out of a sweet sleep in his own particular sanctum.

"Quick, Etheredge, quick, there's news, news, news!" he cried. "We leave for Newhaven and Dieppe in the morning at ten. Set to work, get everything in readiness, never mind sleep, we'll sleep to-morrow." Then, catching Wells by the hands, he almost swung him off his feet as he shouted, "I told you I should find her, Dogger, old chap! I told you I should find her!"

PART THE SECOND
IN ROUEN

Chapter I

THE TELEGRAM

WHEN the day-service boat ran out of New-haven next day shortly before noon, Rivington heaved a mighty sigh of satisfaction and relief.

"The sooner the white cliffs drop behind and the gray ones rise in front the better I shall be pleased!" he said to Wells, with whom he had begun a perambulation of the upper deck. "We're getting nearer with every turn of the screws, anyway."

"Ay, but nearer to what?" asked Wells.

Rivington faced round upon his companion with uplifted eyebrows.

"To what?" he exclaimed. "Why, to her, of course, man! What are we going across for?"

Wells, who was smoking a formidable-looking briar pipe, which he had carefully filled immediately upon leaving the train for the boat, remained silent for a few minutes, during which his brows were gathered together in what was apparently a severe effort of thought.

"You're quite sure we're not off on a wild-goose chase, Daubs, old chap?" he said at length. "I don't want to throw cold water on the scheme, but you know you're one of those awfully impulsive, go-ahead sort of fellows who are rather inclined—eh?"

"No doubt—no doubt, dear old boy!" said Rivington, laughing. "But I am something of a fatalist and a good deal of a believer in luck, and I feel confident that I shall be successful—something tells me that I shall be successful."

"Very reassuring and comfortable feeling to have," said Wells, "but look here, Daubs, what's your plan of campaign? Here we are bound for Paris simply because that chap Marini tells you that he saw Miss de St. Evreux leave Victoria last night on the boat train by this very route. Well, granted that he did, Paris is a pretty big place, and people who want to lose themselves there needn't have much difficulty in doing it. How do you propose to come across Miss de St. Evreux?"

"My dear Dogger," replied Rivington, "although I am a dreamer and a visionary and a most unpractical person in the eyes of most people, I am in reality one of the most mathematically minded individuals in the world. I like

to go on systems and to arrive at results by logical processes. Now, as we are in possession of certain facts relating to Miss de St. Evreux, which show that she was educated at a certain religious establishment in Paris, and that at least two persons of some standing in Paris are acquainted with her, we are in the position to be able to build up from the foundation. We will go first to the authorities of this convent and find out all they can tell us, and I shall be very much surprised indeed if we do not instantly gain some news. For I have invariably noticed, my dear Dogger, that young women who have been bred in convent schools never lose a chance of visiting their old preceptresses when occasion offers—it is, I think, due as much to a womanly vanity to show off their pretty dresses to the soberly clad nuns as to affection for the haunts of their younger days, and I am quite sure that if Miss de St. Evreux has gone to Paris she will sooner or later visit the Convent of Notre Dame.”

“And supposing she hasn’t gone to Paris?” said Wells.

“That,” said Rivington, “seems quite impossible. Of course she has gone to Paris. Where else should she go?”

"I suppose there are places between this and Paris," remarked Wells. "There is Dieppe, for example—only place I can think of just now."

"No," said Rivington, after a moment's thought, "it must be Paris—I have a presentiment that it is Paris."

"Well, and when she is found in Paris—what then?" asked Wells.

"Then I shall ask her to marry me," replied Rivington. "That is obvious. And whether she will or not I shall at any rate find out why she left England in such a mysterious and sudden fashion."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Wells. "Perhaps you think I'm in a carping mood, Daubs, but I can't help feeling there's more in this than you think. I'm a bit muddled by last night. I haven't got over Madame de Marlé and Paradise Court yet."

Rivington laughed.

"Oh, there's nothing mysterious about Madame de Marlé and Paradise Court!" he said. "You don't think surely that Madame has anything to do with the disappearance of Miss de St. Evreux?"

"I don't trust Madame," replied Wells, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "However,

that's neither here nor there. You want to find Miss de St. Evreux, and I'll help you as much as ever I can. Look here, Daubs, let's go down and get some lunch—I'm confoundedly hungry."

There were very few passengers lunching when the two friends got downstairs. There was something more than a fresh breeze that morning, and the minds of the greater number of the people who were crossing seemed to incline rather to the shelter of private cabins and berths than to meat and drink. But at the table next to that whereat Rivington and Wells seated themselves sat a young lady upon whom Wells's attention was very quickly fixed—first of all, because she was satisfying a very healthy appetite in generous fashion, and secondly, because something in her air and appearance made a strong, instant appeal to him.

This young lady was of a type which appears to have sprung into existence during the last twenty-five or thirty years. She was the sort of young woman who can ride a horse, drive a long ball at golf, walk twenty miles in wind and rain, dance all night without fatigue, and in all respects and purposes show herself the equal of man so far as endurance and strength are concerned. She was above the medium height,

sturdily yet gracefully fashioned, her face was pleasant, cheerful, frank, her eyes were bright, her cheeks rosy with good health and a sound constitution. Her thick brown hair was piled up in a businesslike but essentially becoming knot under her smart cloth toque, and she herself was attired, as all young ladies of her type always seem to be, save in the eventide, in a tailor-made coat and skirt which was not a little mannish. When you see such a young woman as this you look round instinctively for a bag full of golf clubs, or a hockey stick, or a gun, or at least a tennis bat. This young woman, however, appeared to have none of these things, but she certainly possessed a huge camera, which, with a golf cloak, manufactured out of some rough material of a rather sporting pattern, lay on a chair at her side.

It did Wells good to see this healthy, vigorous-looking young woman eat and drink. She appeared to have as great a partiality for cold roast beef as a Yorkshire farmer has. She twice dispatched the steward for more, and it was more than evident that she enjoyed it. Moreover, she demanded whisky and soda and drank it with a zest. She, it was plain, was none of your namby-pamby misses who peck at their food

and sip, birdlike, at their drink. It seemed to Wells that the fitting climax to this rosy-cheeked young woman's repast would have been a big cigar. He felt sure, at any rate, that she had a cigarette case somewhere about her.

"If you will pardon my absence for a little time, dear old boy," said Rivington, bending over to Wells with one of his most engaging smiles when they had finished lunch, "I will go forward and see how Etheredge is. I perceive now that we are getting well out into the Channel, that the boat is beginning to roll somewhat, and poor Etheredge is a very bad sailor. If I go and say a few words to him he will perhaps pull himself together. In the face of domestic difficulties, Etheredge is a lion, but once at sea, even in a Channel crossing, he becomes lamblike."

"Make him eat some food and give him a good stiff drink," counseled Wells. He remained in his place when Rivington had gone, staring from time to time at the young woman opposite who, having eaten and drunk to her heart's desire, was now performing some mysterious rites with her camera. "Ripping-looking girl!" he said to himself. "I wonder who she is and where she's going?"

It presently appeared that the young lady's

immediate intention was to go on deck, but the boat was just then performing various movements and evolutions of a somewhat discomposing nature, and when she rose to her feet, clutching her camera under one arm and the large patterned cloak under the other, it was speedily evident that to reach the door of the saloon and the stairway beyond it was a feat that would require more nautical skill than even she was possessed of.

With a grateful appreciation of the blessed fact that there was just then not a single steward in sight, and that the only other man in the saloon was an aged gentleman seated in a far corner and peacefully and laboriously engaged in dipping sticks of dry toast into a bowl of beef tea, Wells sprang joyfully to seize the desired opportunity.

"If you will let me take your camera and cloak under one arm and give you the other to hold on to," he said, suiting the action to the words, "I'll get you upstairs all right."

The young lady stared. She was at least two inches taller than her would-be knight, and much heavier.

"But—what will you hold on to?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm all right!" answered Wells, possess-

ing himself of the cloak and the camera and folding the former dexterously around the latter. "Now if you would get a firm grip on me—don't be afraid."

He steered her safely across the saloon and as far as the foot of the stairway. But there, an extra roll of the boat coming suddenly and the young lady inclining with equal suddenness in the wrong direction, they came hopelessly to grief, and after a vain attempt to save the situation found themselves in a heap on the stairs.

"It was all my fault!" said the young lady ruefully as she gathered herself up.

"Yes," said Wells, "you went the wrong way. Never mind, the camera's safe, I kept a hold on it. Let's try again."

This time he piloted her safely on deck, and at her request saw her established in a sheltered nook. And then, as she simply thanked him with a very frank smile and showed no disposition to keep him at her side, he withdrew and went into hiding to rub a bruised elbow. But later on, as he paced up and down with Rivington, he stole covert glances at the young woman of the camera, and once she looked at him and they smiled.

"And of course she's going somewhere where

I'm not going and we shall never see each other again!" he said to himself. "And she looks just my sort!"

Dieppe at last! Blue-smocked porters, jabbering, gesticulating, elbowing; fiercely mustached gendarmes, all cloak and sword; douaniers, all talk and chalk; porters eager to carry anything, even a handbag, never two whole yards of platform; small boys anxious to sell postcards and willing to accept English pennies; washing hanging out of the windows of the houses beneath which the train is drawn up; old women in frilled caps; old men in sabots; a dog drawing a milk cart; a great smell of fish; much bustle and confusion and coming and going of men in peaked caps and Napoleon the Third beards—finally screeching and grinding and rattling and rumbling, and Dieppe town and its basins, and its old church and its fortifications, and its suburbs gliding away, and in its stead the slowly opening valley of the winding Seine and all the glories of pastoral Normandy—the rich meadows richly stocked with cattle; the little towns and villages by the river; the stately châteaux high above the uplands; the woods in their gay springtime gladness, and over everything the smiling sun.

In his corner of a first-class smoking carriage

Wells went to sleep. He was nodding at Longueville—at Cleres he was as sound asleep as if he had been in his own bunk. He woke at last, because the train stopped, and looked sleepily out of the window next to him. Rouen! Three hours yet to Paris. He closed his eyes again as the train moved out of the station, and before it had got well into the tunnel was fast asleep once more.

A hand on his shoulder, first gentle, then insistent, brought him to consciousness once more. Etheredge, very pale and agitated, was in the compartment.

“Mr. Wells—Mr. Wells! Have you seen my master, sir?”

Wells shook the sleep out of his head.

“Seen him? What do you mean, Etheredge? He was there—in that corner—when I went to sleep—that was some time before we passed Rouen.”

“My master is not on the train, sir!”

“Not on the train? Good heavens!—man—you’re dreaming! Not on——”

“This is a corridor train, sir, and I have searched it from end to end, and Mr. Rivington is not on it. He must have got off at Rouen.”

“Now I come to think of it,” said Wells, “he

was not in the carriage when I woke up at Rouen. He must have got out at Rouen and missed the train. Here, let me go with you and have a look, Etheredge."

But there was no Rivington to be found. Neither, incidentally, was the girl with the camera.

"We must go on to Paris, Etheredge. There'll be a telegram from Mr. Rivington at the Grand."

But no wire was awaiting them at the Grand Hotel, nor did any news of Rivington arrive that night. It was not until noon next day that Wells, who was by that time getting anxious, received this message—sent off from Rouen an hour earlier:

"I have found what I sought. Come back here by the next train, and meet me at Hôtel d'Angleterre. Come, however, as a perfect stranger to me, and do not speak to or recognize me in any way until I make first advance. Let Etheredge come in his proper capacity of my servant, but separately from yourself, and arrive at different times. Be extremely careful about all this, and show no surprise at anything you see on arrival."

An hour later Wells and Etheredge, traveling separately, were on their way back to Rouen.

Chapter II

THE WRONG YOUNG WOMAN

ON THE Quai de la Bourse in Rouen, overlooking the Seine, which here makes yet another of its many twistings and turnings, and is in this sketch at any rate a river crowded with merchandise stands the Hôtel d'Angleterre, its lower windows hidden from the street by a screen of foliage. Behind this screen are little round tables and chairs whereat you may take your coffee after dinner on pleasant evenings, and at the same time—if you are a stranger to the Old Norman city—interest yourself in watching the various types of life which pass and repass under the plane trees in front. On spring evenings this is a very pleasant way of spending that hour after dinner in which laziness is the supreme desire and delight of the soul. There are so many things to look at—a brave soldier in his red trousers, his blue-gray coat, his picturesque képi; a woman with a little filler cup, a big basket, and a huge umbrella; a workman in his blouse and sabots; the blind man, led by his little

daughter who peeps through the leafy screen, and making sure that you are one of those English, comes in with her finger in her mouth, her round eyes shyly entreating you to drop at least a sou in her father's tin cup—all these things you will surely see, together with many others, such as officers in their uniforms, a priest or two in cassock and shovel hat, smart young ladies in very high-heeled shoes, schoolboys in their picturesque hooded cloaks, gendarmerie with white gloves and much sword, together with an infinitude of dogs who have either much license from their owners or exercise the privilege of living ownerless, and accordingly drop in wherever their fancy leads. There is usually a steamer with a black and red funnel loading or unloading just across the quay, and the boots and high-heeled shoes and wooden sabots patter and clatter along the pavement to the rattle of chains and creaking of windlasses. You might be in Hull, or Dublin, or Liverpool if that steamer were all you had to see, but between it and you, hidden behind the leafy screen of the Hôtel d'Angleterre, there is a stream of life perpetually ebbing and flowing which is French, and—to you—foreign.

Within this screen, stretched out lazily in a

basket lounge chair, drawn up by the side of a little table whereon stood a coffee service, a liqueur glass full of some golden-hued liquid, and a stand of matches, sat Wells, alone and therefore silent. It was some seven and a half hours since he had received the mysterious message from Rivington, and two and a half since he had arrived at the Hôtel d'Angleterre. There seemed to be a good many people in the hotel, English and American tourists many of them, but he had seen nothing of Rivington on his arrival, although after being shown to his room he had looked into the various public apartments and had kept an eye on the vestibule. At half-past six he had dined at the *table d'hôte*. There were some thirty or forty other people in the *salle à manger*, and more in the restaurant adjoining it, but Rivington was not among them. Twice, wandering about the place, he had encountered Etheredge. The valet was as immobile of countenance, as much a perfect stranger as he had been from the time he and Wells parted company at the Grand Hotel in Paris and drove off in separate conveyances to the St. Lazare Station. Wells began to think this sort of game mysterious but a trifle dull. He wondered if Rivington had come to any harm; if he had

really met the object of his devotion and his search and had run away with her; if he, Wells, would have to hang about there goodness knows how long, doing nothing, and whether it would be a desertion of what seemed to be his part if he took a turn along the quays and had a look at the outdoor cafés. And in the midst of these speculations a *coupé* drew up at the entrance to the hotel, and Rivington, tossing the driver what appeared to be a highly satisfactory remuneration, got out and walked slowly within the leafy screen. His eyes fell at once on Wells and on a vacant seat close by him. Without a sign of recognition he dropped into the seat with the air of a tired man, and glancing round fixed the attention of a waiter who had just brought coffee to a party of Americans, and beckoning him to his side ordered cognac and soda.

Wells, utterly indifferent in outward appearance to the newcomer, was keeping an eye on Rivington's game. Rivington produced a cigarette case, selected a cigarette, and began to feel in his pockets for his match box. Finding it at last he also found it empty. He looked round him—the match stand on Wells's table caught his eyes. He bent toward that innocently unconscious young gentleman.

"May I trouble you for the matches, sir?" he said, in that peculiarly icy tone which Englishmen invariably affect toward everybody whom they recognize as their own countrymen.

Wells seized the match stand and leaned across the table to hand it to Rivington. As their heads drew nearer together he caught a rapid yet clear whisper, "At the Corneille Statue in half an hour. Be careful." Then Rivington, seizing and striking a match, said in audible tones icier than ever, "Thank you, sir," and lighting his cigarette sat back in his chair and smoked—an incarnation of reserved strangerhood—until his brandy and soda arrived. For some minutes he remained smoking and sipping. At last, without so much as a look at Wells, he rose and lounged into the hotel.

Wells let ten minutes go by, then he, too, rose and went within. He turned into the reading room, just inside the entrance hall, and took up a map of Rouen at which he had gazed idly for a few minutes before. The statue of Corneille? Where the dickens was the statue of Corneille? How was he to find a statue of Corneille or anybody else in a strange city? There was a statue of somebody or other just outside the hotel a little way along the quay, under the trees—was

that it? No, that was the statue of Bordelieu, and there was a bridge over the Seine named after the same chap, who was no doubt some writing or artistic johnny. Corneille—Corneille? Ah, there was a Pont Corneille, a bridge which seemed to cross an island in the middle of the river. Ah, yes, and there was the appointed rendezvous, the Statue de Corneille, on a span of that same island evidently. Very well, that much was plain. It seemed from the map to be close to the hotel; he would make a gradual progress to it. Putting on a cap, lighting a cigar, and furnishing himself with his stoutest stick, Wells presently left the hotel and sauntered away to his left. He passed two or three outdoor cafés, where the chairs were already well filled, and people were enjoying the spring twilight. Then he came to the theater. There were great bills on the doors announcing that M. Mounet-Sully was playing that night, and boys and youths were offering tickets, bought in advance, to passers-by or to late comers who had not already provided themselves. He sauntered farther—along the Quai de Paris, staring at the little shops, at the folk seen through the open doors of *brasseries* and tobacco *dépôts*. And at

length he came to the north end of what he felt sure was the Pont Corneille and turned across it, looking for the statue.

There it was in a recess built off the bridge and rising from the island which he had seen marked in the map. It was now quite dusk, and he could not see the inscription, but as he stood eyeing the statue he heard a quick step behind him, and the next instant Rivington went by with a sharp whisper:

“Follow me across the bridge!”

There were many people coming and going over the Pont Corneille at that moment, but Wells had no difficulty in keeping Rivington's tall figure in sight. Rivington walked slowly, walked as a man walks who goes out to enjoy the cool of the evening. Once or twice he stopped, and leaning over the parapet of the bridge, gazed for a moment or two at the swishing waters of the Seine. When he did this, Wells acted on his own sense of what was best to be done if they, as he fancied, were pursuing a plan of action designed to convince anyone observing them that they were strangers to each other—he passed on, contriving at some little distance to let Rivington repass him. But keeping a sharp

lookout on the people who came and went, he saw nothing to excite any suspicion that they were either observed or followed.

Rivington turned to the left on crossing the bridge and, traversing the Quai d'Elbœuf, proceeded along the Grand Cours until the road gradually left the town. There were now very few people about, a cart or two rattled along the highway toward Sotteville, a train rattled and clanked on the line close by. Out here, now that the dusk had fallen, there was little light. And suddenly Rivington stopped and let Wells come up to him. As they met, he heaved a great sigh of relief.

"There, Dogger!" he said, "I think we shall be safe if we walk a little way along this road—I don't see any signs of our being followed or watched, though goodness knows we may be! However——"

"Look here, Daubs," interrupted Wells, "what's all this mystery about? What's it mean, this dodging and lurking and pretending that we're strangers and all that? I don't half like it. Are you frightened of something or somebody?"

Rivington uttered a sound which was half sigh, half groan.

"To tell you the truth, Dogger," he said, "I don't know exactly whether I am frightened or not. Physically, I am not at all frightened; mentally, I suppose I am uneasy. The fact is, we are in the middle of a mystery."

"I am, without doubt," replied Wells. "But you—surely you have got some sort of news by this? You said in your wire yesterday, 'I have found what I sought.' Did that mean that you had found Miss de St. Evreux?"

"Miss de St. Evreux is here!"

"Here—in Rouen?"

"In Rouen. So, also, is that rosy-cheeked young lady of the camera whom we saw on the boat yesterday."

Wells gasped and came to a halt. He had been thinking of the young lady of the camera a good deal.

"What on earth has she got to do with Miss de St. Evreux?" he exclaimed wonderingly. "There's nothing to be astonished at in her being here. She's probably taking photographs of the place, but why mention her in connection with your affair? You don't mean——"

"I mean, my dear Dogger, that she has something to do with it, and what it is I don't know. Whether it is that she is watching me, or watch-

ing Miss de St. Evreux, or both, or neither, or somebody else who has some connection with us, or one of us, I cannot tell, but she is certainly here either because I am here, or Miss de St. Evreux is here, or somebody who has something to do with one of us or both of us is here. Ostensibly the young lady is amusing herself with her camera; between ourselves I believe the camera to be a mere blind."

"I'm no hand at mysteries, Daubs," he said at last. "Give me a straight course and I'll have a cut in with anybody, but I'm shot if I can understand anything you're talking about."

"Give me a cigar and I'll tell you everything that has happened from the time I left you yesterday until now," said Rivington. "That, of course, is exactly what I want to tell you, so that you can set your brain to work on it. There!—now we will walk gently forward; this road, you see, is very quiet."

"Go ahead, then!" said Wells.

Rivington puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. He kept silent for a minute or two.

"I'll begin at the beginning," he said at length, as they walked slowly on, "and tell you everything as it happened, in order. Then you'll see how things fit in or don't fit in. Some points of

the affair, I promise you, are utterly inexplicable to me. Well, here goes. You will remember, Dogger, that on the way from Dieppe to Rouen you went to sleep. You had had very little sleep the previous night, and when you dropped asleep in the train you were soon sleeping soundly—you were, in fact, hard and fast asleep when the train drew up at Rouen—so fast asleep that you did not hear or see me leave the carriage.”

“No, I didn’t,” agreed Wells. “Though I woke up just after—must have done—for I remember seeing the name Rouen on a board.”

“Well, I left the carriage and the train at Rouen,” continued Rivington, “left them for a good reason—I had seen Miss de St. Evreux!”

“Yes?”

“When the train came to a standstill in the station I got up to find Etheredge, whom I believed to be about two compartments away on the left of my own. I walked down the corridor and could not find him. I came back and went the other way: he was not to be seen in that direction either. I proceeded to walk along the corridor, toward the rear of the train, looking into each carriage. While I was thus engaged I saw the young lady of the camera leave the train—in-

deed, as there was no porter just at hand, I helped her with her baggage. Then I went on in search of Etheredge. He, however, was not to be found in the rear portion of the train, so I came to the conclusion that he was in the front part. I, however, was now in the last carriage close to the guard's van, and the train was just beginning to move out of the station. Out of sheer idle curiosity I put my head out of the window and took a look round. We were passing the exit—outside it, in the courtyard of the station, I saw, as it were in the flash of an eye, Yvette de St. Evreux herself, just stepping into a *coupé*. I bounded to the door of the carriage—on that side it was locked. I leaped to the other—it was open. I got out on to the step—the train was gathering speed. At the risk of a good rolling in the dust I dropped off and came off unhurt, except for a bruise to my right knee, and was then some sixty yards past the platform. I ran back to be received with exclamations and gesticulations by sundry officials who had witnessed my foolhardy proceeding. It took me some minutes to calm and reassure them—more minutes to question porters, drivers, and loafers outside the station as to where the young lady had gone to who had driven off in a *coupé* a few minutes before. Oh!

they remembered her perfectly—*une demoiselle Anglaise*, of a certainty. Where, but to the Hôtel de France, Rue des Carmes? I drove like a fury to the Hôtel de France—asked for the young English lady who had just arrived—and was shown into the presence of—the rosy-cheeked damsel of the camera!”

Chapter III

THE THREE VEHICLES

"You may imagine, my dear boy," continued Rivington, "the utter amazement with which the damsel of the camera confronted me and the disappointment which I experienced on confronting her. To say that we stood staring at each other for a full minute, probably with wide eyes and open mouths, would, I sincerely believe, be no exaggeration. As to myself, I was no very presentable sight. To begin with, I was bare of head and dusty of raiment, for I had left my headgear in the compartment wherein you were so peacefully slumbering, and in spite of my gymnastic performance in leaping from the train, had rolled at least once over in the dust and cinders of the railway track. Therefore I suppose I looked rather like a madman."

"If I am not mistaken," said Wells, "the camera young woman possesses a strong sense of humor."

"I entirely agree with you, Dogger," said

Rivington, "she does possess a very keen sense of humor. That saved the situation and put us at our ease. Greatly to the admiration of the waiter who had shown me into the *salle de lecture* and had manufactured a reason for lingering there, the lady of the camera broke the silence and the ice with what one might almost call a shriek of laughter, and then said with truly British *sang-froid*—

"What is the matter?"

"The matter, madam,' I replied, 'the matter is that I have made a huge mistake—I have mistaken you for somebody else.'

"She glanced at my uncovered and unkempt head, and then at my dusty, begrimed clothes.

"But you appear,' she said almost archly, 'you appear to have been in the wars. I hope you have not been fighting?'

"I will seek refuge in the truth,' I said. 'And the truth is that after assisting you with your baggage just now I went along the train to find my servant whom I did not find, and chancing to look out of the window I saw someone on the platform of whom I am in search.'

"She interrupted me with a sudden drawing together of her brows and a quick look in her eyes.

“‘A young lady?’ she said.

“‘Why do you think that?’ I asked.

“‘Because you followed me,’ she answered, quickly enough.

“‘True,’ said I. ‘The lady is young. And seeing her on the platform I leaped from the train when it was in motion, rolled in the dust, and ran back to the station. According to the various intelligent functionaries at the station you were the young lady I was in search of, and you have driven to the Hôtel de France. Therefore I drove to the Hôtel de France—here I am—and I am disappointed—yet there are compensations,’ I added, as graciously as an untidy man could.”

“Oh, you began making up to her, did you?” inquired Wells.

“Dogger, Dogger, don’t use vulgar terms! Of course I spoke nicely to her—was not she a woman?”

“What did she say to that?” growled Wells.

“To that? Nothing. She is a matter-of-fact young person, the camera damsel, whoever she is. She merely remarked that she was sorry for my disappointment and hoped I should be successful in my search. Then, as by an afterthought, she said, ‘I am staying in Rouen for a few days; perhaps, if you describe your lost friend to me

I can help you to find her, though, as this is not London or Paris, you will surely come across her quickly.' I therefore described Yvette to her, made my bow, and left her, she observing that she would be findable any morning somewhere about the town in company with the camera."

"Umph!" said Wells.

"Now you see my predicament," continued Rivington. "There I was, friendless and alone in Rouen, certain that I had seen Yvette and equally certain that she had escaped me. However, to know that she was there, in the same city, was a great deal. I made my toilet at the Hôtel de France, took a drink, sallied out to the nearest hat shop to buy a hat, purchased a rather pretty walking cane and some gloves, and then went down to my old quarters, the Angleterre, to book rooms and to tell them that my man and luggage would arrive on the morrow. And after that, there still remaining nearly two hours before dinnertime, I went back to the station, hoping that I might find the man into whose *coupé* I had seen Yvette stepping as the train moved past the sortie. That man, however, was not to be found. Some others had a dim notion that two ladies had driven up to the station in a *coupé* about the time of the arrival of

the Dieppe-Paris express, but they were as certain that they were not English as they were positive that the young lady I wanted was she of the camera at the Hôtel de France. Had not all the young English ladies cheeks of the most red and eyes of the brightest? Then I remembered that Miss de St. Evreux is not at all English in appearance and that I ought not to have labeled her English in describing her. It was evident that there was nothing to be done at the station. I met with nothing but obtuseness in every quarter. So I walked round the central part of the town for an hour or so, hoping that I might see Yvette. But when I eventually returned to the Hôtel d'Angleterre a little after six o'clock, I had seen nothing of her. She might, for aught that I knew, be within a hundred yards of me, but how was I to find her?"

"You were certain, Daubs, that it was Miss de St. Evreux of whom you caught that passing glimpse?" asked Wells.

"I never doubted it, dear boy, for a moment," answered Rivington. "It was impossible to doubt it. When you have seen Yvette you will know why. Well, to resume, I dined in the hotel and afterward sat outside there, wondering what to do next and how to go about things.

After a time I strolled along the quay in the eastward direction and came to the theater and saw that Monsieur Mounet-Sully was playing that evening, and having nothing that I could think of doing, I decided to go to the play. I therefore purchased a seat in a part of the house in which it was not necessary to appear in evening dress, and in due course I took my place. I had not been there very long when I saw the damsel of the camera enter. She was attended, in due form, by a cavalier."

Wells threw the end of his cigar away. The darkness veiled a decided frown which spread itself all over his face.

"What sort of chap was he?" he inquired.

"The cavalier? A medium-height, dapper, Napoleoned little Frenchman, most suave, polite, dancing-masterified person, evidently devoted heart and soul to the young lady of the camera. She was very simply but excellently gowned; he was in evening dress, of course, and had a bit of ribbon in his buttonhole. They appeared to take great interest in the house. So did I, for it had occurred to me that since Yvette was in Rouen it was not improbable that she might come to the theater. As events proved, she did."

"Did, eh? That was luck!" said Wells.

"Most fortunate. The manner of it was this," continued Rivington. "A few minutes before the rising of the curtain I noticed some slight commotion amongst the people in my neighborhood. Following their glances, I saw that three persons had entered one of the best placed boxes and were at that moment in full view of the house. It needed but one glance to assure myself that I was once more gazing upon Yvette. But what an Yvette! She was most magnificently and beautifully attired, there were diaminds in her hair, her ears, around her neck—never, I will venture to affirm, nay, swear, had the good folk of Rouen seen such a dazzling young beauty. And yet—and yet—though it was but a few days before that I had walked and talked with her in London, she was changed. Dogger, she was changed!"

"Well, of course, all that finery would change her," commented Wells.

"It was not the silks, the laces, or the diamonds," said Rivington. "It was something in herself. But let me tell you of her companions. One was a handsome, fine-featured woman of, I should say, forty-five or fifty years, dressed in excellent taste, evidently of high breeding, but

from exterior appearances cold, hard, and reserved, and of a haughty aspect. The other was a tall, massively built man, dark, bearded, who wore the ribbon of some order—what, I could not tell—across his breast. He was one of those impassive, immobile men—an iceberg seen from without, possibly a volcano within—who betray nothing in look or gesture. During the whole of the performance he never showed either approval or enthusiasm. Now and then he spoke to Yvette with great outward show of politeness and courtliness, but he never smiled, and save for the extraordinary brightness and glitter of his eyes you might have said that his face was a mask. I need not tell you, Dogger, that for me the performance on the stage had no interest. Indeed, I cannot remember anything of it—my entire attention was given to the three people in the box. What was Yvette doing there? Who were her companions? I asked myself a thousand times and endeavored to supply myself with fitting answers, but could find none.”

“Don’t you think, old chap, that it’s quite possible, seeing you know really so very little of Miss de St. Evreux, you know, that these people may be relations of hers?” asked Wells. “I confess that’s what would strike me.”

"The thought certainly did occur to me," replied Rivington. "It was of course my first thought. But for some curious reason, which I could not analyze or explain, I found myself unable to accept it. I scrutinized both man and woman closely, and saw, or thought I saw, something in their faces which made it impossible for me to believe that they were kinsfolk of Yvette. And yet I knew that, in spite of my dislike to that thought, my inability to believe in it, it might be true."

"That," remarked Wells, "is more in accordance with practical common sense. But proceed, Daubs, it's getting as interesting as it's mysterious. What—er—what was the camera girl and her Froggy doing all this time?"

"I confess," replied Rivington, "that I did not give them much of my attention, Dogger. I saw the young lady look at Yvette and her companions when they entered the box—after that she gave her attention to the play. No, I saw little of those two until the performance was over. Then I certainly did see them. What then happened was this—I was determined that Yvette should see me and that she should have the opportunity of speaking to me, and so, a little time before the final curtain, I went down

to the principal entrance and posted myself at a point which I knew she and her party must pass. Finally they came along, a little apart from the mass of people. The tall bearded man with the inscrutable face and hard, glittering eyes walked between the ladies. Yvette was on his left hand, and on that side of the door at which I had posted myself. I purposely turned away as they drew near, then turned again suddenly and met her face to face. I put what entreaty I could into my eyes, my face, as we looked at each other. She turned deathly pale, and for a second her hand went to her bosom. She gave me a glance which I could not translate or comprehend. The man caught her eye and mine. In less time than it takes to tell it, he had swept her and the elder lady out of the theater and into a private brougham which was in waiting at the curb. As they crossed the pavement the camera girl and her companion passed. She saw me, gave me a curious look—perhaps I looked bowled over, for I was—and then a pleasant nod. There was a *fiacre* just behind the brougham. The camera girl and her companion got into it. These two vehicles moved away from the other carriages and conveyances and went up the Rue Grand Pont slowly, for there was a good deal of

traffic and the street is but narrow. Seeing them move away an uncontrollable desire to follow the brougham seized me. I ran after it up the street. Both vehicles made little headway until they had passed the Cathedral—even then in the Rue des Carmes there was a crush. At the Hôtel de France I thought the camera girl and her companion would stop. To my surprise their *fiacre* went on in rear of the brougham. An idea struck me that possibly the occupants of the *fiacre* were following the occupants of the brougham. That resolved me—I would follow both. At the corner of the Rue des Carmes and the Rue Ganterie both carriages turned into the latter and proceeded west. I hurried after them as quickly as I could until, meeting a *coupé*, I jumped into it and bade the driver follow, at a little distance, the two vehicles in front. The man, a quick-witted fellow, understood well and played his part to perfection. In this order, then, we went along the Rue des Bons Enfants, crossed the Place Cauchoise and began to climb the sloping ground which leads to the Place St. Gervais. The carriages in front then going at a walking pace and I, knowing that their speed would not be accelerated, jumped out of my *coupé* and, bidding the driver wait for me in a side street

which I indicated, followed them on foot, keeping out of sight as much as possible. And this is what I saw. The brougham stopped at a door in a high wall which surrounded one of the large houses near the Rue Tabourat, and its three occupants immediately disappeared within. The *fiacre* passed the brougham at this very moment and went farther up the hill. I waited. Within five minutes, exactly as I expected, the *fiacre* returned down the hill, and in the light of a street lamp I saw that it was still occupied by the camera girl and her companion. I let it go on, then returned to my *coupé*, and bade the man follow as before. We followed them as far as the corner of the Rue des Bons Enfants and the Rue Jeanne d'Arc, then the *fiacre* stopped, and the man got out and turned down the latter street toward the river. The camera girl went on and was eventually driven into the courtyard of the Hôtel de France.

"I returned to my own hotel," continued Rivington, after a slight pause, during which Wells filled and lighted his pipe—a sure sign that he was thinking hard—"wondering what all this meant, but absolutely certain that the camera girl had followed Yvette and her companions. I walked slowly, pondering much.

Reaching the hotel I was informed that a gentleman had asked for me by name. Judge of my astonishment on entering the private room into which they had shown him to find myself confronting the man whom I had seen with Yvette de St. Evreux at the theater!"

Chapter IV

REFUSED!

AT THIS point of his narration Rivington paused and looked around him as if to examine his surroundings. They had now walked some distance out of the city, along the left bank of the Seine. Over against them, on their right, on the other side of the railing, they saw the lights of Sotteville; across the river, at the head of a high promontory, a twinkling, starlike light shining from some cottage denoted the whereabouts of the village of Bon Secours. The darkness had now fallen, and all around them was silence.

"We will turn back now," said Rivington. "I can complete what I have yet to tell of my adventures before we reach the outskirts, where, my dear Dogger, I fear we must once more separate. Well, as I said—I found myself confronted by the man whom I had seen in Yvette's company at the theater. It was but half an hour since I had watched him, Yvette, and their companion enter the walled garden in the Place St. Gervais

—it was plain, then, that he had come to me immediately after escorting his charges home.

“I looked at this man narrowly, now that we were face to face and alone. He, too, regarded me with more than usual attention. I saw that he was no ordinary man—there was determination, resource, strategy, in his eyes, and the dominant characteristic of his expression was a certain quality of ironlike will which could not fail to impress anyone who came into close quarters with him. His face was absolutely immobile as he stood in an erect, statue-like attitude watching me. His features might have been carved out of marble, and I noticed, now that I was so near to him, that his brow and cheeks were of a peculiar tint—a tint something like that of old ivory—or like that strange pallor which comes over the face of a dead man some little time after death. It was only the eyes—the hard, glittering, sinister eyes—that proved to you that the man was alive. It was for all the world, Dogger, as if you were looking at a man whose body was dead but whose soul was still living within it, staring at you, balefully, from somewhere deep within the dead brain.”

“Pleasant, indeed,” said Wells. “You’ll give me the creeps in a minute, Daubs.”

"Well," continued Rivington, "I suppose we stared at each other for a few seconds, and then we exchanged ceremonious bows. I silently indicated a chair to my visitor, and he bowed again, and, still standing, addressed me in excellent English.

"I have the honor to address Mr. Rivington?" he said.

"I bowed without remark. Then, with another bow, he seated himself in the chair which I had silently offered. I took another facing him.

"I have called upon you, Mr. Rivington," he began, 'in the belief that a few words from me may save much trouble and anxiety.'

"To whom, sir?" I asked.

"To yourself for one," he answered; 'to the lady whom you know as Miss de St. Evreux for another.'

"For a moment I regarded him steadily. He, too, watched me with a quiet calculation as to how his remark had affected me.

"Before I say anything upon this point," I said presently, 'may I ask to whom I have the honor of speaking?'

"For answer he drew a card case from his pocket, and taking out a highly glazed card, laid it before me with a bow.

“‘Pardon,’ he said, ‘I should have made myself known to you before.’

“I looked at the card. I read in the center Monsieur Thomas Dubarle, and in the left-hand corner an address in Paris. Laying the card aside I remarked quietly, ‘Am I to understand, Monsieur Dubarle, that Miss de St. Evreux is a kinswoman of yours?’

“He inclined his head gravely and politely.

“‘The lady whom you know as Miss de St. Evreux, Mr. Rivington, is my niece—the only child of my late brother, George Dubarle. She is also my adopted daughter.’

“‘I am to understand further, then, that the real name of——’

“‘My niece’s real name, sir,’ he interrupted, ‘is Yvette Dubarle.’

“There was a brief silence between us. At last, ‘I am glad to know that Miss Dubarle is not without relations and friends,’ I said, eyeing him closely.

“To this he responded with a bow. Then, after toying idly for a moment with the card, which I had laid on the table between us, he looked at me with fixed attention.

“‘It is best to be plain spoken,’ he said. ‘Your sudden appearance at the theater this

evening occasioned great distress to my niece, Mr. Rivington.'

"'It would give me the greatest distress conceivable to think that any action of mine should occasion trouble and embarrassment to your niece, sir,' I answered. 'There is no woman in the world whom I would more willingly shield from distress of even the slightest nature—if I had the right,' I added significantly.

"'Precisely,' he said. 'If you had the right. But you have not the right, Mr. Rivington—you have not even the right to follow my niece to Rouen. She told you that she was leaving England for good, said farewell to you, and offered her gratitude for your kindness to her by telling you that she should always pray for your prosperity.'

"That rather bowled me out, Dogger, old boy! It was evident that the man was quite conversant with the terms of Yvette's letter to me—he had either seen it or she had told him of the contents. Before I could make up my mind what to say Monsieur Dubarle went on.

"'It is not necessary, Mr. Rivington, to enter into details to any unnecessary extent. I am not, I believe, outside the truth when I say that you followed my niece?'

"I saw no good in fencing with him, Dogger, so I spoke plainly.

"'It is quite true, Monsieur,' I said, 'that I followed your niece. I was greatly concerned to find that she had left London, and I determined to leave no stone unturned until I had found her.'

"He nodded his head.

"'I may ask why?' he said suggestively.

"'Certainly,' I replied. 'I love your niece, and it is the sincere desire of my heart to marry her. Since I have told you this, let me tell you further, Monsieur, that as you come to me as her kinsman, I am only too eager to tell you anything you wish to know as to myself, my position, my——'

"He lifted his hand and shook his head.

"'It is precisely because I know you for an honest gentleman, Mr. Rivington, that I come to you to-night. There is no need for any such course as you propose. I know who you are, your character, your qualities, your position in life. I have merely to tell you that marriage between yourself and my niece is impossible!'

"I remained silent for a moment. Then, 'Am I to understand that your niece concurs in that decision, Monsieur?' I inquired.

“‘As you have not proposed marriage to my niece,’ he replied, ‘it is scarcely likely, Mr. Rivington, that she should be in a position to concur.’

“‘Then, Monsieur,’ I said, ‘I refuse to accept any decision except her own. I desire the opportunity of pleading my own cause to this lady, and shall not be satisfied until I have found it——’

“‘You would not give her annoyance—distress——’ he began.

“‘She and I, Monsieur,’ I said, ‘have met each other sufficiently to know more than a little of each other’s qualities. She knows that I would give her nothing but happiness, pleasure, contentment——’

“He raised his hand, as if to stop me.

“‘Mr. Rivington,’ he said, ‘you shall have this opportunity. My niece and I are stopping, on our way to Paris, at the house of my sister, Madame d’Andelys, who lives near the church of St. Gervais—the Villa Pimontelle. If you will call there to-morrow morning at ten o’clock you shall see my niece.’

“I was too overjoyed at the frank invitation, Dogger, to reply instantly. Before I could get out a word he spoke again.

“‘I am sufficiently impressed by what I have seen of you, Mr. Rivington,’ he said, eyeing me keenly, but with something approaching a species of kindness in his glance, ‘to believe that whatever answer my niece gives to you, you will accept as final. I will grant that, as things are, you have a right to speak to her, and it is only just that you should be afforded an opportunity to speak. But you will bear in mind, as a gentleman, that you may be mistaken in believing that my niece cares for you, and that her own plans for her future are not necessarily—yours.’

“‘Therewith, without another word, he favored me with a ceremonious bow and departed before I had time to fully analyze his last sentences. I sat down and thought things over. And the thought forced itself in upon me over and over again: Was the man straight?—was his story true?—was he really Yvette’s kinsman?—more than anything else, was Yvette under undue influence, under coercion?

“‘Eventually, Dogger, I went to my room, sorely puzzled. Just consider how quickly things had gone! To-day is Thursday—last Monday I was with Yvette in the Zoological Gardens in London—on Tuesday night I heard she had left England—on Wednesday I found her, here, and

before midnight had been informed by a strange and mysterious personage that she was—not for me. I did not sleep very much, for I was thinking all these things over. But the more I thought the more I was puzzled. The only solution I could come to was that this Monsieur Dubarle's story must be true, that he was a sort of fairy uncle who had turned up suddenly, and that he had ambitions for Yvette. If his ambitions were the sole cause of his apparent disinclination to a marriage between his niece and myself—well, I felt they might be overcome. But something gave me an uncomfortable notion—a presentiment—that there was something else, something behind, some mystery of which I could not as yet gather even a thread.

“I presented myself at the Villa Pimontelle this morning exactly as the clock of St. Gervais was striking ten. And now, Dogger, prepare yourself for the most astonishing part of this narrative—the most astonishing to me, at any rate. I saw Yvette—alone—without any restriction. She was calm, cool, composed, quite at her ease. She was friendly, frank, companionable—almost affectionate in her manner—and she—refused me!”

In the silence which followed Wells suddenly

uttered a sound which Rivington did not understand. It was a sudden sharp drawing in of his breath—a click of his teeth.

“Yes?” said Rivington questioningly. “You’re surprised, of course, Dogger, after all I’ve told you. So was I.”

“Go on, Daubs,” said Wells. “Tell the rest.”

“I was received,” resumed Rivington, “by Monsieur Dubarle, who almost immediately presented me to his sister, Madame d’Andelys, the lady whom I had seen at the theater with him and Yvette. They were both exceedingly polite, almost cordial, and treated me with the utmost courtesy. There was nothing in either, nor in what I saw of the house, to excite any suspicion. There was a pretty garden, trim maidservant, evidences of taste and culture in the salon into which I was shown. There I was presently left alone. Yvette came to me.

“I have never been more surprised, Dogger, in all my life, than I was during the next half hour. Before she had been in the room five minutes I had asked her to marry me—asked her as clearly and collectedly as I could, though I fear I did let my feelings carry me away somewhat. Could I help it? She heard me very quietly and with

great sweetness, but I could see it was like a revelation—that there was no response.

“‘I am sorry,’ she answered. ‘I am deeply sorry—but it is impossible.’

“I pressed her for a reason. What made it impossible? Why was it impossible? Would it always be impossible? Oh, I don’t know now what I didn’t say!”

“Usual things, I suppose, old chap,” commented Wells. “Go on.”

“She heard me in that matter, too, very kindly,” continued Rivington. “And in the end she looked at me quite candidly and said that if I must really have the reason of her refusal it was that she did not care for me.”

“A facer!” said Wells.

“Yes,” admitted Rivington, “I’ll admit it. And of course I could not argue with her on that point—she was so frank, so candid. All through she treated me with quite a—a sisterly candor—sort of appealed to me, you know. And in the end she talked in quite a sisterly fashion. She had no thought of marriage; she said she certainly had some ambitions and projects, but she preferred not to speak of them. At present she wished to devote herself to her uncle, who had

done much for her. She gave me some slight particulars of herself and of her uncle. It appears that when she was left an orphan, at a very early age, she was placed by this Monsieur Dubarle at a convent school in Paris, to the authorities of which he paid her charges in advance for a long term of years. He himself disappeared soon afterward—he was shipwrecked, it seems, on the Australian coast, and for years lived a roving life in strange places. Now he has returned to France with a vast fortune—it was to join him that she suddenly left London. I asked her why she had not given such friends as she had there the opportunity to bid her farewell. She replied, with perfect candor, that for certain personal reasons—reasons, she said, of feeling—she had chosen to leave as she did. And then she answered me, naming Madame de Marlé, the Willoughbys, and myself, that she should always think the warmest thoughts of us all.

“‘And yet,’ I said, interrupting her, ‘you dismiss me!’

“‘At that she gave me a look which was so full of appeal to my best self, Dogger, that I kissed her hand, said a few words to her which—they weren’t very clear—meant that her word was

my law—and found myself outside. Monsieur Dubarle was awaiting me.

“‘I have to thank you and to say farewell to you, Monsieur,’ I said.

“He offered me his hand.

“‘I knew you for an honest English gentleman, Mr. Rivington,’ he responded

“He walked down the garden with me—both of us silent. As we came to the door in the garden wall there was a sudden ringing of the bell. Monsieur Dubarle opened the door—there, rosy-cheeked and blue-eyed as ever, stood the damsel of the camera!”

Chapter V

THE LADY OF THE CAMERA.

THE effect of Rivington's last communication upon Wells was to adduce from him another exclamation of an extraordinary sort.

"What, again!" he said. "And there?"

"I thought that would surprise you," said Rivington. "Yes, there she was, camera and all. Now, Dogger, I want you to follow carefully what I have to tell you. First of all, do you know anything whatever about photography?"

"Precious little," answered Wells. "I used to mess about it when I was a youngster—never did much, though. What of that?"

"I wish you to pay particular attention to what I shall tell you of this young lady's doings. When Monsieur Dubarle opened the door in the garden wall she was standing about two yards from it, on the path. She was holding the camera immediately in front of her and looking down at it. Her attitude, her manner, everything about her indicated that she had not expected her ring

to be answered so promptly. She started, as if in confusion, when the door was opened, revealing Monsieur Dubarle and myself. But I will stake all I possess in this world, Dogger, against a china orange, that in that very instant she took a snapshot of us! It was so quickly and cleverly done that it would have passed unnoticed by ninety-nine out of every hundred people. I am sure Monsieur Dubarle observed nothing—I did. That she got a snapshot of the two of us, standing there in the doorway, with the light full on us, I'll swear!"

"Well—and what next?" asked Wells quietly.

"Next she fell into the prettiest confusion. You know," continued Rivington, laughing a little at the recollection, "you know the gushing type of English girl who becomes all blushes and giggles and——"

"I had a brief conversation with this particular young lady on the boat," interrupted Wells dryly, "and if you want my opinion, Daubs, old chap, she's about the last person in the world either to gush or to giggle."

"That, my dear Dogger, being your opinion, I shall certainly not attempt to controvert it," said Rivington. "I shall merely remark that, if the young lady is not naturally inclined to

gushing and giggling, she is one of the most accomplished actresses I have ever had the good fortune to meet. For with my own eyes and my own ears I saw and heard her play the part of the English *ingénue* who gushes and giggles freely. At sight of Monsieur Dubarle—she never took the slightest notice of me, though she knew me, of course, quite well—she broke out into broken and very bad French. Monsieur Dubarle, with the utmost courtesy, addressed her in English—his English, as I told you, is perfect. Her eyes lighted up with the real girlish delight; she poured out a flood of eloquence. Really, he must think it so strange, would he pardon such an unwarranted liberty—the fact was, she was most anxious to get a view of the group of houses standing on the other side of the Place St. Gervais, across the way, with the spire of the church in the background, and from the level of the Place she could not obtain what she wanted. She had observed from across the Place that in Monsieur's garden there was an elevated terrace (the Villa Pimontelle, Dogger, stands high), would Monsieur do her the great favor to allow her to take the view from that excellent point of vantage, and would he, please, please pardon the intrusion?"

"Well, I don't see any great amount of gush about that, anyhow!" said Wells. "If the girl thought she could get a better result from the garden of these people, why shouldn't she——"

"Excellent, excellent, my dear Dogger!" laughed Rivington. "I should agree with you entirely if the young lady had not been so very naïve, so very just-released-from-the-school-roomy in her manner, if she had not made so many protestations, and if she had not talked twenty-five to the dozen—a manner which, from what I have seen of her—very little, of course—but my opinion has just been corroborated by your own, was not natural, but assumed. Am I clear?"

"Well, go on," growled Wells. "What happened?"

"When he could get a word in edgeways," said Rivington, "Monsieur Dubarle explained that this was not his house or his garden, but that he felt sure that his sister, the proprietress, would be only too pleased if Mademoiselle availed herself of the advantage of the position she had indicated. If Mademoiselle would excuse him but one brief moment he would conduct her to his sister. He turned from her with a bow and walked out of the door with me. We

stepped a pace or two along the street in silence.

“‘I rely upon your honor, Mr. Rivington,’ he said at last.

“‘I turned and faced him.

“‘Monsieur Dubarle,’ I said, ‘your niece has told me plainly but with great candor and kindness that she does not care for me. To say that I am surprised does not argue that I am a coxcomb. A few days ago I was under the impression—an impression certainly not derived from anything she ever said or did, an impression which we will now call erroneous, founded upon too eager hopes and a sincere respect and affection—that her answer might have been different. As it is—what it is, I shall leave Rouen tomorrow.’

“‘He bowed in his usual courteous, if proud, fashion.

“‘But there is one thing I would ask, Monsieur Dubarle,’ I went on. ‘Is it impossible that my friendship for your niece—hers for me—should not continue? In time to come, for example——’

“‘Mr. Rivington,’ he said, interrupting me, ‘if, in time to come, such a course should be agreeable to my niece I shall be pleased to see you at my home in Paris. For the present, matters must remain according to the compact ar-

rived at between us. I thank you for your frank behavior and wish you well.'

"With that he once more gave me his hand, bowed, turned away. I heard the door in the garden wall close with a sharp click of the lock. I, too, turned away—in the opposite direction. If I am to tell you the truth, Dogger, old boy, I felt confused, annoyed—it was all so utterly puzzling.

"I walked a few yards along the street. Suddenly I thought of the girl with the camera. Now, what was the particular part she was playing in all this? That she and her escort at the theater on the previous night had followed Monsieur Dubarle and his companions home I was certain. Now, the morning after, she had obtained entrance, at any rate, to their garden, after a bit of consummate acting, for acting it was, Dogger. What was her game? The thought of this put all other thoughts out of my mind. I know all that district very well, for I have spent a good deal of time in Rouen during the past five years, and I knew where I could command a view of the garden and the front of the Villa Pimontelle. I crossed the road, slipped down a side street across the way, turned up another, came round a third, and entered a little café restaurant where there is an upstairs *salle*

à manger, one of the windows of which I proposed to use as a coign of vantage.

"There was no one in the room, it was only half-past ten, and therefore too early for *déjeuner*, and there was nothing easier than to look out upon the Villa Pimontelle through the lace curtains. I ordered a bottle of wine, lighted a cigarette, and when I was alone, turned my attention to what I desired to overlook. My young lady of the camera was making herself at home on the terrace. She was most actively pointing out this and that to Monsieur Dubarle and Madame his sister. They, on their part, were all smiles and bows. Presently out came Yvette and joined the group. The young lady of the camera appeared to take several views of the houses and the church spire. Finally, having satisfied herself, she began to depart with evident becks and nods and wreathed smiles—as artless a young English thing as you could find. Don't growl like that, my dear Dogger—you must know by this time that our young friend of the rosy cheeks is playing some game."

"Well, get on with it," said Wells. "What next?"

"It was next evident that Madame d'Andelys was persuading the fair photographer to enter

the house. Eventually she did. Within the house she remained just half an hour. Finally she left, escorted to the gate by Monsieur Dubarle, as courteous and grand seigneurish as ever. She tripped away, with her camera, along the Rue St. Gervais. As for me, I slipped out of my café restaurant, negotiated my side streets, and came in sight of her again as she crossed the Place Cauchoise. And keeping her in view I followed her, at a proper distance, until she eventually turned into the Rue des Carmes. Then, close to her hotel, I stepped up to her.

“‘If you will pardon me for saying so,’ I said politely, but, I trust, very pointedly, ‘I have a particular desire to speak to you.’

“‘She looked at me very closely and very quietly. There was no gush or giggle about her now, Dogger; she looked at me as a man of iron nerve looks down the barrel of a suddenly leveled revolver. And when she spoke her voice was as steady and as hard as her eyes.

“‘The Rue St. Romain, on the north side of the Cathedral, is a most interesting street,’ she said. ‘There are several quaint old shops in it; I shall be found looking into one or other of them in ten minutes from now.’

“‘I bowed and turned away without a word,

more mystified than ever. And after walking round a little I made my way to the Rue St. Romain. There she was examining some old brasses in a shop window. Beyond ourselves and one or two old women and children and a priest in his cassock, reading his office as he came along, there was no one in sight. I advanced to her side.

“‘Well, sir?’ she said. ‘You may now speak.’

“That was blunt enough. I answered just as bluntly.

“‘If I am not greatly mistaken,’ I said, ‘you have something of mine which you have no right to have.’

“‘Will you be pleased to name it?’ she retorted.

“‘An undeveloped negative of my photograph,’ I said meaningly.

“‘Oh!’ she said. ‘You were quick enough to recognize that, were you?’

“‘And to appreciate your wonderful talents as an actress,’ I went on. ‘I congratulate you. But why should my photograph be taken—together with that of Monsieur Dubarle?’

“‘Let us walk a little way along the street,’ she said.

“I walked in silence at her side, waiting for her to speak. A few yards farther on she turned

under an archway into a courtyard, around which were some ancient-looking and evidently empty houses. 'A moment,' she said, and disappeared within what I took to be the concierge's lodge. She almost instantly returned, dangling a large key. 'This way,' she said, 'I am going to look at a studio. You can give me the benefit of your advice.'

"'You are, then, an artist?' I ventured to say, as we crossed some cobblestones and turned into one of the empty houses.

"'I trust I am a clever artist—in my way,' she answered.

"To that I said nothing. She unlocked a door; we found ourselves in a large unfurnished room, lighted from the top. She turned to me.

"'This is better than the open street,' she said, 'although the Rue St. Romain is certainly almost as quiet as the grave. Well—I should not have taken your photograph if you had not chanced to be in such close proximity to—Monsieur Dubarle. As it is, I will destroy whatever comes off your side of the negative. I have no use for your photograph.'

"'Ah, then you have for—Monsieur Dubarle?' I said.

"'Some things go without saying,' said she.

‘You should not ask too many questions, nor leading ones.’

“‘You are an extremely mysterious young lady,’ I said. ‘Do not think me impertinent if I say that you puzzle me.’

“‘Certainly not,’ she answered. ‘It is a valuable compliment. Do not think me impertinent if I inquire how long you are staying in Rouen?’

“‘I leave here to-morrow,’ I replied, seeing no reason why I should not answer her question.

“‘Nor unduly inquisitive,’ she continued, ‘if I ask if you have found the young lady of whom you were in search yesterday afternoon?’

“‘I am so convinced of your abilities and your penetration by this time,’ said I, ‘that I shall not presume to deny that I have.’

“She regarded me steadily for a full moment.

“‘She is a very beautiful woman,’ she said at length. ‘I suppose you would go through fire and water for her, Mr. Rivington?’

“That made me jump. I stared at her as at something uncanny.

“‘You know me?’ I exclaimed.

“‘I heard your lecture last year on “The Unattainable in Perfection,”’ she said, with an enigmatical smile.

“‘May I not know whom I have the honor

of speaking to?' I said in my most pressing manner. Don't growl, Dogger!—I assure you that——"

"Oh, go on!" said Wells. "Hang it, Daubs!—you seem to have had a lot of adventure out of it while I was pelting to Paris and back. What next?"

"‘At present,’ she replied, ‘no. Now we will go—I am famishing and it is time for *déjeuner* at my hotel.’ And she walked me down into the street again, saying, ‘You to the left—I to the right—au revoir, m’sieu,’ and went off, cool as—what’s that?"

A slight rustling in the hedgerow by which they were walking—a calm, penetrating whisper:

"Do not be alarmed, sir—it is I—Etheredge!"

"Good heavens! Etheredge? What is it?"

"The lady that we saw on the boat, sir—the young lady who had a camera—I have a message from her. I am to conduct you and Mr. Wells to a café where she will meet you. She has important news for you, sir, and particularly wishes Mr. Wells to be present."

As he spoke, Etheredge pressed something into his master's hands. He spoke again—quietly as ever—

"Your revolvers, sir—quite ready for use. I—I thought it well to be on the safe side, sir!"

Chapter VI

AT THE CHÂT JAUNE

WELLS broke the silence which followed with a low whistle.

"This," he said, "begins to get more and more interesting. You had better hand one of those revolvers over to Etheredge, Rivington—it so happens that I have one of my own on me."

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said Etheredge. "I am already provided for, sir. I never travel unarmed, sir."

"But really," said Rivington, "is it necessary? Do you really think that we are in any danger, Etheredge? I—I am a little surprised, confused, by your sudden appearance. When did this young lady meet you, and what are the precise terms of her message?"

"I will explain the matter clearly, sir," replied Etheredge, in his usual composed manner. "Having supped at nine o'clock and there being nothing to attend to, I went for a walk along the front

of the quays. As I passed by the theater the young lady of whom I have spoken came up from behind, and passing me swiftly said, without turning her head, 'I wish to speak to Mr. Rivington's man—cross to the other side near the river.' I immediately recognized the young lady, sir, and after going a little way farther I crossed to the parapet which is immediately in front of the Hôtel de Paris. There were a few strollers there, but it was otherwise quiet. I affected to be interested in the reflection of the starlight in the water, and leaned over the parapet of the stone wall watching it. Presently the young lady joined me. 'Your master and his friend have gone along the Grand Cours on the other side of the river,' she said, 'and have probably followed the field path along the river-side. I want you, in your master's interests, to meet them as they return to the city and tell them that I wish them both—and particularly your master's friend—to meet me at the Chât Jaune, in the Rue Vieux Palais, at half-past ten. Stay,' she said, 'do you know the place?' I replied that I did know it. 'Then,' she said, 'I will leave it to you, whom I perceive to be a discreet and confidential person, to bring the gentlemen there by such means as you think best, but

separately. When you reach the place you will meet a man at the door who, upon your pronouncing the words "Jeanne d'Arc," will conduct you to a room where I shall meet you.' This, sir, was the sum of the young lady's communication," concluded Etheredge.

"And a most mysterious communication, too!" exclaimed Rivington. "But listen, Etheredge, did the young lady give you no proof of her good faith—did she not say anything which would warrant you in taking me to this place?"

"I believe, sir," replied Etheredge, "that I have the honor to possess your unbounded confidence, and I will therefore reply frankly that the young lady did make a communication to me which for the moment I should prefer not to speak of, for I am assured that she will make it to you herself at the Chât Jaune, whither, sir, I strongly advise you to repair, especially as there are three of us and we are all well armed."

"Then let us go to the Chât Jaune, by all means," said Rivington. "What say you, Wells? Are you inclined for an adventure?"

"Spoiling for it!" answered Wells. "But look here, you and Etheredge seem to know this place like a book—I don't. If we are to go separately, how do I get there?"

"I think, sir," said Etheredge modestly, "that if I may venture an opinion, it would be well if you proceeded to the southwest corner of the church of St. Eloi alone, by way of the Pont Bordelieu, while Mr. Wells, following me at a little distance, reaches the same point by the Pont Corneille. The Chât Jaune is only just round the corner from there."

"Very good—then I go straight there," said Rivington, and strode off in the darkness while Wells and the valet waited behind.

"This is a queer business, Etheredge," observed Wells, as the sound of Rivington's footsteps died away.

"A most mysterious business, sir," answered Etheredge respectfully.

"Are we going to hear any explanation of it?" suggested Wells.

"I should not feel surprised if we heard some startling communication, sir," replied Etheredge. "We will now, if you please, set out, sir. If you will keep me in sight, we shall presently be in the lights again. I will conduct you to the church of St. Eloi, close to our destination."

After a walk of some twenty minutes' duration Etheredge and Wells entered the quiet little square wherein stands the church of St.

Eloi. They found Rivington standing in the shadow of a buttress.

"It is just half-past ten," he said as they came up to him. "Everything about here is absolutely quiet—there is not a soul to be seen in any of these streets."

"Follow me, if you please, gentlemen," said Etheredge.

He led the way round the corner into the Rue Vieux Palais and at the distance of a few yards along the street rapped twice at a door which was instantly opened by a stout man in a white apron. "Jeanne d'Arc," said Etheredge. "*Entrez, m'sieu,*" responded the man. He closed the door when they had entered, and then, passing them without comment, signed them to follow him along a dimly lighted passage. At the end of this he threw open a double door and stood aside with a bow. Rivington and Wells, closely followed by Etheredge, stepped into a room where other people were already assembled. The door closed behind them.

This room, unlike the passage, was well lighted, and when the eyes of the two friends became accustomed to the light they saw that three persons who had been seated round a table in the center had risen and were bowing politely

to them. Of these persons Rivington instantly recognized one as the man whom he had seen at the theater with the young lady of the camera. The second—another man—he did not know at all. The third, a woman of apparently middle age, whose hair was already turning gray and who wore dark spectacles, was also a stranger to him. It was this person who broke the silence.

“Good-evening, Mr. Rivington,” she said in the voice of the camera girl. “I thank you for your punctuality and hasten to assure you that you are among friends.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Rivington. “It is you, then—but what an admirable disguise! It is really.”

“I told you this morning that I hoped I was something of an artist,” she said, interrupting him. “But sit down with us, please. We believe you can help us and we can help you. As I have already said, you are among friends.”

Thus adjured and assured, Rivington and Wells, the latter open-mouthed with astonishment, took seats at the table. Etheredge remained standing, but at a word from the lady, who appeared to be in command, he took a seat at the foot of the table and assumed an attitude of attentive and respectful propriety.

"Mr. Rivington," said the lady, "I ask you, for a few minutes at least, to place yourself entirely in my hands, on my personal assurance to you that in what we are now doing and in the questions I wish to ask you I am endeavoring to assist you in the matter which brought you to Rouen. Will you do this?"

"I cannot deny," answered Rivington, after a moment's consideration of this proposition, "that all this seems to me most mysterious and inexplicable, but I have seen sufficient proof of your abilities, Madame, to warrant me in saying that I consent."

"That is good and wise, as you will soon see," said the lady. "Let us proceed. Mr. Rivington, you came to France in search of the young lady known to you as Miss de St. Evreux, with whom you are in love and whom you sincerely desire to marry?"

"I did."

"Did you receive a very sudden intimation of Miss de St. Evreux's departure from England?"

"Very sudden."

"From herself?"

"From herself."

"How long have you known Miss de St. Evreux, Mr. Rivington?"

"For some months."

"Where did you first meet her in London?"

"At Madame de Marlé's."

"Who is Madame de Marlé?"

"Madame de Marlé is a professor of music."

"Living where?"

"In a flat which she names Paradise Court, in Minobar Mansions. I met Miss de St. Evreux there at Madame de Marlé's Sunday evening receptions. A great many young people—literary, artistic, musical—are to be found there."

"Many foreigners?"

"A good many."

The lady paused for a moment and consulted a small notebook which lay on the table beneath her folded hands.

"On the eleventh of this month, and again on the twenty-second, Mr. Rivington, you took Miss de St. Evreux to the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park?" she asked.

"Certainly I did!" answered Rivington, in much astonishment.

"Are those the only occasions on which you have met her alone?"

"They are."

"Mr. Rivington—beyond your knowledge of the fact that Miss de St. Evreux was employed

as governess in the family of Mr. Willoughby, in Cumberland Terrace, did you, until within these last forty-eight hours, have any knowledge of her private history?"

"No," replied Rivington slowly. "I had not. I knew nothing until, night before last, Mr. Willoughby told me that Miss de St. Evreux had been brought up from childhood in a convent in Paris, and since leaving it had earned her living as a governess."

"Turn your attention to the events of last night, Mr. Rivington. You saw Miss de St. Evreux at the theater here in company with a lady and a gentleman?"

"Yes."

"Later on, the gentleman called on you at your hotel?"

"He did."

"What name did he give you?"

"That of Monsieur Thomas Dubarle—with an address in Paris."

"What took place—briefly?"

"Monsieur Dubarle represented himself to me as the uncle of Miss de St. Evreux. He said that it was impossible that a marriage should be arranged between his niece and myself—utterly impossible—and begged me not to pur-

sue her with any attention. I told him that if his niece would give me an answer with her own lips I would accept it. He thereupon invited me to call upon his niece at the Villa Pimontelle this morning."

"What was the result of your visit, Mr. Rivington?"

"Miss de St. Evreux very candidly and kindly refused me."

"You were surprised?"

"Frankly—yes."

"Have you anything to suggest, anything to remark upon, as to this?"

"Merely," replied Rivington, after a moment's reflection, "that in spite of Miss de St. Evreux's candor and kindness I could not help feeling that there was some difference in her. She was not what she was on Monday last, when she and I were at the Zoological Gardens. I cannot explain the difference to myself."

"In the course of her conversation with you this morning, Mr. Rivington, did Miss de St. Evreux tell you anything of her uncle, Monsieur Dubarle?"

"The merest trifle. That, when she was left an orphan, he placed her in the convent school of which I have spoken; that he himself was then

abroad for many years and led a roving life, and that he had recently returned to France a very rich man."

"One more question, Mr. Rivington, and I have done. When you left the Villa Pimontelle this morning, did Monsieur Dubarle exact any promise from you as to your immediate movements?"

"There was no promise exacted in the strict sense of the word, but I told him that I should leave for England to-morrow."

The lady at the head of the table bowed her thanks. She turned to her two companions, and for a moment they conversed in a language which neither Rivington nor Wells understood. Presently the man whom Rivington did not know—a somewhat elderly man, full bearded—turned to him.

"I suppose, sir," he said, speaking in good English, but with a foreign accent, "I suppose you never saw Monsieur Dubarle in London?"

"Certainly not," replied Rivington. "I never saw him until last night."

The questioner nodded and addressed some remark to the lady. She looked at Rivington and smiled. Then she whipped off her dark spectacles and smiled out of her blue eyes.

“Well, Mr. Rivington—and Mr. Wells,” she said, favoring the astonished naval officer with a friendly glance, “you—at least you, Mr. Rivington—have been very candid, and we think it well, knowing you both to be English gentlemen, and that you, Mr. Rivington, are genuinely and sincerely in love with this young lady and therefore anxious about her welfare, to be equally candid with you. We also extend our candor to your confidential servant, Mr. Etheredge, whom I have already had reason to trust in years past. That astonishes you, Mr. Rivington? Never mind, you may trust Etheredge to the fullest extent.”

Etheredge bowed a modest acknowledgment of this approval.

“The fact is, Mr. Rivington,” continued this mysterious young lady, “my companions and I are secret agents of the Russian government. I am a perfectly respectable Englishwoman, gentlemen—my name is Angelica Maxwell, and my father is a well-known Leicestershire clergyman. This gentleman”—she indicated the man with whom Rivington had seen her at the theater—“is Monsieur Simond; this gentleman”—she turned to the other—“is Monsieur Dequis. Monsieur Dequis and I are employed in London

—Monsieur Simond in Paris. Now, gentlemen, you know us.”

“Miss Maxwell,” said Rivington, “will you tell us something of what all this means?”

“That,” replied Miss Maxwell, “is what I am about to do. I take it, from what I have seen, that Mr. Wells is hand-in-glove with you in this affair?”

“That is precisely so—as long as my leave lasts,” said Wells bluntly.

“Then I shall explain to you both. The man Dubarle is not Dubarle at all—he is a Russian of high rank who, many years ago, was concerned in a terrible outrage in St. Petersburg, in which others of his family were also mixed up. He was sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to one of banishment to Siberia—for life. Within the last two years he escaped—nothing was heard of him until recently, when he appeared in London. Monsieur Dequis and I have had him under observation. We will not tell you his real name yet—that he is the man of whom I speak we now know. What we do not know is—what he is after, and what share Miss de St. Evreux has in his plans, or what use he is making of her, or is about to make. From what we have heard of her she is a dupe—a cat’s-paw

to be. If that be so, we are as anxious as you are to save her.

“For four successive Wednesday evenings she has met this man at various cafés in Soho. Day before yesterday he came here by the morning boat—she followed by the night boat. It is our belief that the next act will be played in Paris. Why do we think that? Because a certain personage of distinction, whom I need not name, is to visit Paris, incognito, within the next two or three weeks.”

“What is to be done to save her?” said Rivington, in genuine distress. “I would stake my life on her innocence.”

“The thing to be done, gentlemen, is to follow my instructions implicitly. To-morrow morning, Mr. Rivington, you and Etheredge return, as openly as possible, to London. Remain there a day or two—let yourselves be seen. Then, as secretly as you can, go to Paris, and find a lodging in some quiet suburb where—attend to this—you can always have a swift motor car in readiness. Communicate your address in Paris to Mr. Wells, who will meet you next Tuesday at noon at the crossroads at Rosny, just beneath the fort. Mr. Wells—you will go to Paris to-night—an express runs through the Gare de

l'Ouest at about half-past four, which they will stop for you. Wait instructions from me at the Grand Hotel—go about as much as you like. That is all, gentlemen. Now go—and trust to me. We will save Miss de St. Evreux yet!”

PART THE THIRD
IN PARIS

Chapter I

ANOTHER CURTAIN RISES

BETWEEN the Thursday evening which witnessed the fateful meeting at the Chât Jaune and the noontide of the following Tuesday seemed to Rivington an interminable stretch of time. It was a time of whirl and bustle, too—a rapid transference of himself and Etheredge from Rouen to London, and a feverish rushing about there, making arrangements for the delivery to his order in Paris of a new and powerful first-class automobile—finally a hurried journey by night to the French capital, and a quick consultation next morning with a house agent, who lost no time in providing Rivington with precisely what he wanted, as soon as he discovered that the young man was rich and very free with his money. By the Monday evening, then, he and Etheredge were safely installed in a quiet and charmingly situated little villa in the Charanton district, and in the coach house at the foot of the tree-surrounded garden reposed a De Dietrich.

Despite all their preparations and provisions, however, Rivington was ill at ease and sorely distressed in mind. The revelations made at the Chât Jaune had opened his eyes to many possibilities of evil and danger to the woman he loved. If Miss Maxwell's story were true, and her theories correct, Yvette must surely be in daily, even hourly, peril. Rivington had small sympathy with secret-service agents of any sort. It seemed to him that work such as they accomplished was the work of a spy, and he could find it in his mind to apply other terms than "terrible outrage" to whatever it was that the man who called himself Dubarle might have done in bygone years. Instinctively a lover of liberty and freedom, Rivington felt that these "outrages" in Russia might more accurately be classed in the despairing and frenzied protests against oppressive wrong from a half-maddened people. No one, he would have argued, blames the poor rat, driven into his last corner, if he turns and makes a final vicious protest and bites his hardest as he bites his last. Therefore, it seemed to him, the "outrage" which the so-called Dubarle and his friends had compassed for his share in which the man himself, having escaped death, had suffered imprisonment in the

living tomb of Siberia, might not affect others with so much horror as it must necessarily assume in the eyes of paid agents. But that had little to do with the question of Yvette's safety. Rivington recognized that if the man known as Dubarle was meditating some desperate action, she, being in his company, could scarcely fail to escape some result of it.

To him the whole affair was more mysterious than ever. Over and over again, traveling from Rouen to London, and again from London to Paris, he tried to account for certain things, to describe certain facts with other perhaps less certain facts. He had no reason to doubt Miss Maxwell was right when she said that for four successive Wednesday evenings Yvette had met the so-called Dubarle at various restaurants in Soho under suspicious circumstances. Now, if the man was in reality her kinsman, why should there have been all this secrecy in his dealings with her? Why should he not have gone openly to the Willoughbys' house, proclaimed himself as the young woman's uncle, and announced his intention of providing for her in future? What need was there of hole-and-corner meetings? And, though these were matters of which Rivington did not desire to think, how was it that

Yvette, who had always seemed so candid, so frank in all her dealings with himself, could lend herself to this underground work? True, she was under no obligation to anyone, she was not deceiving anyone, she had a perfect right to manage her own affairs in her own way—yet there was the fact that she met this man in what could only be properly described as a clandestine fashion. Rivington remembered what a difficult task he himself had had in persuading her to accompany him to the Zoological Gardens, how she had seemed to think that such an excursion would not be according to the conventional proprieties, how shy and modest she had been at their meeting. And yet, at that very period, she was meeting this so-styled Dubarle in a way that might well be called underhand. It was more than strange—it was mysterious. But in the midst of all these perplexing thoughts Rivington never doubted Yvette for a moment. He recalled all the conversations he had had with her at Madame de Marlé's receptions; he went over and over their talk at the Zoological Gardens, and he found it impossible to believe that Yvette, as he had known her in even such scant opportunities as these, was likely to be a woman of a double life. Yet there had been a difference in

her when he met her at Rouen. What it was he could not explain to himself, but it was there. And knowing of its existence, Rivington found his mind inexpressibly tormented by the question: Was Yvette under some powerful influence which for the time being had completely changed her individuality? He had heard of such influences, and knew them to be possible. The so-called Dubarle was a man of immense mental power—that was evident on the face of things—was it not possible that for purposes of his own he was working on Yvette's mind and compelling her to assist him in—what?

Rivington was full of these thoughts when, on the following Tuesday, he waited at the cross-roads at Rosny for the coming of Wells. Since the eventful evening at the Chât Jaune he had heard nothing from either Wells or Miss Maxwell though the latter had promised to telegraph to him in London if anything of any note happened on the Friday or Saturday. Wondering if Wells would keep the appointment, and what news he would have to give him, he lounged idly about the roadside, staring at such folk as came along or at the outworks of the Fort which rose frowning and threatening above him. Certainly he scarcely saw anything—his mind was too busy

to allow his eyes to do more than stare blankly at the things about him. He had, in fact, almost lapsed into unconsciousness of his situation when he was suddenly brought to his senses by the sound of a familiar voice:

"Here you are, Daubs, old chap! Climb in and have a ride!"

Rivington turned in amazement to find a smart motor car drawing up on the road almost at his elbow. In the driver's seat sat Wells, his eyes hidden by a huge pair of goggles, his mouth widened in a gigantic smile. Everything about him seemed to denote a heyday of jollity and pleasure; there was keen enjoyment in the tilt of his snub nose and gayety seemed to exude from his multitudinous freckles. But Wells was not alone. By his side sat a lady, very smartly but quietly clad in a long coat of dark blue cloth finished with a deep collar of sable, a lady of something under middle age, whose very dark hair, coiled in a heavy knot at the back of her neck, was surmounted by a rakish bowler hat around which a veil was arranged in the fashion affected by hunting ladies. Rivington, hastily uncovering at the sight of this unexpected apparition, was conscious that behind the veil was

a much-bronzed complexion, very white teeth, and a pair of blue spectacles.

"Is that really you, Wells?" exclaimed Rivington. "Dear me, I——"

"Look here, old chap," interrupted Wells. "I want to introduce you to my Aunt Jemima—Mrs. Farrington—Aunt Jim, this is my friend Rivington. Awfully strange coincidence, Daubs, wasn't it, that Aunt Jim and I should strike Paris just about the same time? We dropped across each other in the Rue Royale on Saturday. This is Aunt Jim's craft—I've been learning how to navigate it since Sunday morning. But get in, old boy, we're going to lunch at a spot a few miles out—run you there in no time."

Rivington climbed up to a seat at the back of the car, wondering what had made Wells bring a female relative with him on such an important occasion.

"I say, Dogger," he said, "you're quite certain you can drive all right? Because I don't believe you were ever in a motor in your life before Sunday, you know."

"All right, old chap," said Wells reassuringly. "I'm a wonderful hand at picking up anything. Just wait until we've got past this village in

front here, then I'll let her go. You can do a good fifty miles an hour on this car—can't you, Aunt Jim?"

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Rivington," said the newly qualified driver's aunt. "I am an experienced motorist. I'll take care that this very youthful nephew of mine plays no tricks with us. He has certainly proved himself a very apt and quick pupil. Now you may let her go a little, Dick."

Mrs. Farrington had a pleasant, musical voice, but somewhat high-pitched. Rivington began to wonder whether Wells had ever told him of her. Was she his mother's or his father's sister? He leaned over to the front of the car.

"It must have been a great pleasure to you to meet your nephew unexpectedly in Paris, Mrs. Farrington," he said.

"Oh, a great pleasure indeed, Mr. Rivington. I had not seen him for such a long time, you know. Don't you think he's grown?"

"Grown?" said Rivington. "I—well, I—really, perhaps he has a little."

"Quite a nice boy, too," said Mrs. Farrington. "There, Dick, that will do—that is quite fast enough. I don't want you to frighten Mr. Rivington. Do you motor, Mr. Rivington?"

"I have just bought a car," answered Rivington, "but I can't drive it."

"That's a great pity—if you are staying in Paris you must let my nephew give you some lessons."

"What sort of a car is it, Daubs?" asked Wells. "A good 'un?"

"It's a De Dietrich—eighty horsepower," answered Rivington.

"That's excellent," said Mrs. Farrington. "I should like to try it. I have often driven."

"I shall be greatly honored if you will, Mrs. Farrington," said Rivington. "Perhaps Wells and I can arrange matters——"

"Oh, we'll arrange 'em all right, old chap!" said Wells. "Now, then, Aunt Jim, which way—left, right, or straight ahead?"

"To your left as far as Bondy—then to your right, straight along the Metz Road as far as Livry," replied Mrs. Farrington. "We will lunch there."

Rivington was speedily aware that Wells's aunt had been giving him special instructions in the art of driving an automobile. Every now and then she leaned over to him and gave him advice or hints—once or twice, as the road was straight and there was little traffic about, she

allowed him to go at a speed which took Rivington's breath away—finally, a few miles outside of Livry, she took the wheel herself and let Rivington see what her car could do. He noticed that her wrists were like steel.

“And now I am sure that Mr. Rivington must be very hungry,” said Mrs. Farrington, as at last they came to a standstill before the door of a little hotel. “Dick, do you see that the car is safely housed for an hour or two while we see what we can get for lunch. This is a quiet little place, and good—I have been here often.”

She preceded Rivington into a little *salle à manger* and explained her wants promptly and clearly to an admiring waiter, who foresaw much profit to himself in the advent of people who descended upon him in a swift motor car. And when he had departed to enter upon a period of great activity, and they had the little room to themselves, she turned from a mirror whereat she had been taking off her veil and said, with a certain arch intonation:

“I really believe that I am something of an artist, after all, Mr. Rivington!” Rivington, who had been staring out of the window, wondering when he would get the chance of a talk with

Wells, turned toward the lady as if he had been shot. The veil and the spectacles were gone.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Is it really you, Miss Maxwell?"

"At your service, Mr. Rivington," she replied, bowing.

"You are indeed a very clever woman!" said Rivington admiringly. "I am afraid of you."

"Be thankful, then, that I am not on your track. For I should catch you, you know."

"That makes me hopeful that you can and will help me in the matter. Have you any news for me, Miss Maxwell?"

"I have a lot to tell you, Mr. Rivington, but I will tell it to you while we lunch and when Mr. Wells comes in. I have been assiduously teaching him how to drive ever since Saturday morning, because if we use that De Dietrich of yours, I wish him to drive it."

"More mystery," sighed Rivington. "But—I am very anxious—can you not give me some news of——"

"She is safe, as yet," said Miss Maxwell. "And I do not think there is any immediate danger."

"Where is she?" asked Rivington.

"She is in Paris," replied Miss Maxwell. "Sit down—here—Mr. Rivington, and I will tell you just a little, to make your mind easy. Monsieur Dubarle (we will agree to call him so for the present) and Miss de St. Evreux traveled from Rouen to Paris on Saturday. Happening quite by accident, you know, to be also traveling to Paris, I came across them on the train. Monsieur Dubarle was just as polite to me as on Thursday last, when I gained admittance to the Villa Pimontelle. Indeed, he invited me to call upon his niece at their apartment. They are living, I may tell you, at a most expensive and handsomely appointed flat in the neighborhood of the Champs Élysées, the sort of place that only a millionaire ought to afford. To Monsieur Dubarle, I am Miss Virginia Steyne—a singularly young and gushing English miss, whose conversation, I believe, he finds amusing."

"But," said Rivington, now more anxious than ever, "can you give me no idea, Miss Maxwell, of what this man's plans, his schemes, his intentions are, and what part Miss de St. Evreux is to play in them?"

Miss Maxwell looked around her and then leaned over the table and spoke in a low voice.

"The distinguished personage of whom I spoke

to you on Thursday at the Chât Jaune," she said, "arrived in Paris last night. It is my belief that Dubarle is plotting his assassination, and that Miss de St. Evreux, unknown to herself, is to be used as a decoy!"

Chapter II

MOLE'S WORK

ON HEARING this declaration of opinion from Miss Maxwell, Rivington was conscious of a sudden sinking of the heart. He half rose from the table.

"What are you going to do?" inquired his companion, stretching out a hand. "Sit down again, Mr. Rivington."

"Yes," said Rivington mechanically, "I suppose that is all I can do. But I felt as if I must go to her help at once. My God! Miss Maxwell, think of what that means!—a decoy!"

Miss Maxwell nodded her head, with a grave appreciation of Rivington's feeling.

"Yes," she said, "it sounds dreadful, I know. But that is the theory which we have worked out—Simond, Dequis, and myself. There are many things in favor of it—I will tell you of them presently, when Mr. Wells joins us. But just let me say this, Mr. Rivington, do not be alarmed about Miss de St. Evreux at present.

She is safe up to now, and it will be in our interest to keep her safe. We have her and Dubarle under close observation. I may tell you that, as a matter of fact, we have one of our most skillful agents in Dubarle's household, and that we shall receive constant reports. We are taking every precaution. What we really want is to let matters develop until we are certain of our theories and our plans, and then——”

“Yes, and then?” asked Rivington, noticing that she paused and hesitated.

“Then—well, we want to get this man red-handed if we can, and at the same time to save Miss de St. Evreux.”

Rivington looked at her anxiously and doubtfully.

“That is to say you want things to go on until she is at the very edge of the abyss?” he said.

“We will see that she does not go over,” interrupted Miss Maxwell quickly. Rivington shook his head. A new look had come into his face, and Miss Maxwell was quick to see it.

“You will not mind if I speak very plainly,” he said slowly and in low tones. “It seems to me that not only Dubarle but yourselves—your secret agents—wish to make Miss de St. Evreux a means toward an end. Why not rescue her

now, instead of letting things go on until it may be—too late? If this man Dubarle is nothing to her, why should she remain one hour longer under his roof? If he is meditating the assassination of the eminent personage who is coming to Paris, incognito, why permit Miss de St. Evreux to remain in ignorance of the fact that she is living with a would-be murderer——”

Miss Maxwell interrupted him with a significant lifting of her hand.

“Mr. Rivington,” she said, “I want you to try to recognize that in this matter I not only know more than you know, but am better able to do the right thing, to adopt the wisest course. It would be utterly useless for you, for me, for anybody, to approach Miss de St. Evreux at present, because she is under the influence—how exerted and in what special form I cannot yet say—of Monsieur Dubarle. It is my opinion that this influence is hypnotic.”

Rivington almost shouted an exclamation. Miss Maxwell raised a warning finger.

“Ah!” he said. “That—that is what has been struggling to get to the top in my thoughts! Did I not say, Miss Maxwell, that she was not herself? That is, that must be the reason. But, my God! how dreadful to think that this man should

have such a power over her! It is, it is almost unbearable!”

“Don’t despair and don’t give way, Mr. Rivington. It is, after all, a better thing that Miss de St. Evreux should be under such an influence than that she should be what we were at first inclined to suspect—a willing accomplice.”

“You thought that?” exclaimed Rivington.

“Why not? What did we know of Miss de St. Evreux but that she was meeting this man clandestinely, under most suspicious circumstances? We knew him and his record; there is a proverb of our own, is there not, which says that a man is known by the company he keeps. Of course, if she kept such company, she could not avoid suspicion. No, it is better as it is. But here comes Mr. Wells.”

Wells was sober mannered enough as he took a seat at the table whereat Miss Maxwell and Rivington had already placed themselves. He gave a quick glance at both.

“I see you have been talking business,” he said. “Look here, Daubs, old chap, there’s just one thing I want to say—follow Miss Maxwell’s advice implicitly. I have seen enough since I came here to assure myself that if anybody will save Miss de St. Evreux, she will.”

"Thank you, Mr. Wells," said Miss Maxwell, "that is a very generous compliment; I shall try to live up to it."

"My Aunt Jemima," said Wells, relaxing into a broad grin, "is a most accomplished woman, especially as a coach in teaching you the whole art of driving a motor car."

"I am in Miss Maxwell's hands," said Rivington, "and I am deeply grateful to her. I only wish that I personally could be of more use; I feel as if I were doing nothing."

"Oh, but you will do a great deal!" said Miss Maxwell. "To begin with, you have provided the motor car—a—a De Dietrich, I think you said?"

"It is all ready, awaiting your instructions," answered Rivington. "But I have not the least idea of what it is wanted for."

"Then I will tell you," said Miss Maxwell. "It is wanted for this. If things develop as I believe they will develop, I shall kidnap Miss de St. Evreux."

"Kidnap her!"

"I shall kidnap her and have her miles away before Dubarle or anybody else knows where she is. And Mr. Wells will drive. Therefore, he must

use this new motor and get used to it. He has nerve enough for anything requiring pluck and dash—that was why I pressed him into service.”

“I can only say once more that you are a very wonderful young woman!” exclaimed Rivington. “You think of everything.”

“Naturally I do, it being part and parcel of my profession to anticipate and to prepare for contingencies. But as I see the waiter approaching with an omelette of which he is most inordinately proud, and which we must be sure to praise unreservedly, I should prefer not to think of anything for the next half hour but food, and of drink, if somebody would discover the most advisable wine in our host’s cellar—I have had nothing since my coffee at six o’clock.”

Later on, however, over coffee and cigarettes, Miss Maxwell returned to the subject which was occupying all their thoughts.

“Now, since you have expressed your willingness to place yourself entirely in my hands, Mr. Rivington,” she said, “I want you to do exactly what I ask you to do. To-night you must go to the opera. You will there see Miss de St. Evreux.”

“And Dubarle?”

“Dubarle, without doubt. Unless all my theo-

ries, all my workings-out in this matter, are wholly and radically wrong, Dubarle will play his first card to-night. He has secured one of the best boxes, in one of the most conspicuous situations in the house, and there he will show himself and his niece—especially his niece.”

Rivington winced.

“Why should he thus show himself, and her—and especially her?” he asked.

“Because, Mr. Rivington, the eminent personage who is in Paris, incognito, will be at the opera.”

“And Dubarle wishes him to see—his niece?”

“Dubarle most certainly wishes the eminent personage to see—his niece.”

“I should like to know,” said Rivington after a pause, “who this eminent personage really is. May I not know?”

“Well,” replied Miss Maxwell, “I do not think there is any reason now why you should not. He will be known here as plain Monsieur Sem-enoff—he is in reality General——” She whispered a name which of late had been too famous throughout Europe. Rivington’s eyebrows arched themselves. Wells, who was now informed of the unknown’s identity for the first time, whistled.

"What!" exclaimed Rivington. "That—that monster!"

"Ah, to be sure!" said Miss Maxwell. "He is exactly what you say—a monster. If I were asked to define him I should call him a human beast. I never heard anything good of him—he is cruel, he is wicked, he is as full of evil as an egg is full of meat; he is, I suppose, by this time, drunk with blood. But he is a man of iron will, a statesman, clever, resourceful, and necessary to the Czar."

"It would not afford me the least matter for regret," said Rivington, "if I heard that such a man had been torn to death by wild horses!"

"Nor me," said Miss Maxwell quickly. "But I am not in a position to regard him as a man—to me he is an official."

Rivington jerked his head.

"I am afraid all my sympathies are with Dubarle!" he said. "Why, it would be a work of charity to the world to rid it of a swine like that! I'm tempted to go and help Dubarle to do it."

Miss Maxwell looked at Rivington gently—Wells clapped a hand on his arm.

"Now, then, Daubs!" he said, "none of your damned old Radical rot. If you go off on that tack we shall never get you round. Just realize

that the pilot's come aboard, old chap, and that you've got to obey orders. Besides, think of Miss de St. Evreux."

"Hang it, Dogger, I am thinking of her!" exclaimed Rivington. "Her! a decoy to a fellow like that! Oh, it's maddening, it's——"

"But you are not making it any better," said Miss Maxwell. "Come, now!"

"Well," said Rivington after a pause, "I leave it all to you, Miss Maxwell. But the thought of that man even looking at—— Oh! What is he in Paris for?"

"He is on his master's business—which is to negotiate a new loan. Now he will be at the opera to-night. No one, of course, will know him. He will accompany the Russian Ambassador. I wish you to be there."

"If I go," said Rivington gloomily, "I shall be recognized by Dubarle."

"No, you will not, I have arranged everything for you. You see the name and address on this card. Present yourself there—of course, in evening dress—at seven o'clock this evening. Within half an hour Monsieur Jacques, who is the most consummate artist living, will have transformed you into a very handsome gentleman of sixty, and will have done it in such perfect fashion that no

one could detect his handiwork. You need not be afraid of anything. You can sit in the front of your box, in the full glare of the light, with absolute confidence. Another gentleman will join you in that box—you may enter into conversation with him.”

“But the box?” said Rivington.

“Here is your ticket for it,” replied Miss Maxwell, producing an envelope. “Now let me give you my final instructions before Mr. Wells runs us back—you to Charenton, I to Paris. Keep your eyes open at the opera—study the faces of the people in the Russian Ambassador’s box—you will recognize Monsieur Semenoff by the fact that he, of all men in the box, will wear no orders, and by his stature—he is a very tall man. Observe Dubarle, and do not look too much at Miss de St. Evreux. Mingle with others between the acts, hear if anything is said of Miss de St. Evreux’s beauty, betray no sign yourself. And when it is all over go back to Monsieur Jacques, who will take thirty-five years off your age as cleverly as he put it on.”

“I wish Monsieur Jacques could take off my load of anxiety!” said Rivington. “But I will follow your instructions implicitly, Miss Maxwell.”

"Then I will once more become Aunt Jemima Farrington," said Miss Maxwell, "and my nephew, whom I have been so pleased to meet—and who has certainly grown since I last saw him—shall drive us back."

That night, standing in front of a mirror to which Monsieur Jacques politely bowed him, Rivington marveled at the transformation which the man had wrought.

"You are a great artist, Monsieur Jacques," he said with conviction.

Monsieur Jacques bowed.

"I always endeavor to realize, Monsieur," said he. "I regarded Monsieur on his entrance. 'What,' said I to myself, 'what will Monsieur be at sixty years of age?' I saw Monsieur, as it were, mentally, a picture of Monsieur at that dignified age, and upon that I worked. Behold! Monsieur is satisfied?"

"As I said before, you are a great artist—yes, a genius," replied Rivington. "Indeed, I do not know myself, yet I see myself as I shall be. And so I am really to be a handsome old gentleman?"

Ushered a little later into his box at the opera, Rivington found it already occupied by a short, stout, rotund gentleman of middle age,

who rejoiced in a florid complexion, a gray head, and mutton-chop whiskers of a pepper-and-salt tinge. He bowed politely but distantly.

"It's all right, Daubs," said Wells's familiar voice in a whisper. "The chap did me up to look as he says I shall look at fifty-five. Do you think I shall really be as stout as this? Hang it all, do you know I've got an india-rubber stomach on!"

When Rivington had done laughing he sighed deeply.

"This is a strange business, Dogger," he said. "You know I'm feeling all the time that I ought to go straight to her and tell her everything and beg her to go back with me to England to the Willoughbys, where she'd be safe, and——"

"And a damned nice mess you'd make of it, too," said Wells. "You leave everything to my Aunt Jemima, who is entirely——"

"Is your Aunt Jemima in the house?" inquired Rivington.

"She is, but she is her young and gushing self to-night," replied Wells. "The johnny who is with her, confound him! with the poet's hair and the eyeglass and the generally artistic look, is that chap Dequis. And there's the other man, Simond, somewhere about; see! that is Dubarle's box, there, and that, exactly op-

posite it, is the box in which our Russian friend will appear. But they're empty yet."

On those two boxes Rivington fixed his attention. As the overture to *Carmen* began and the vast audience settled down to quietude, three men entered the Russian Ambassador's box and took seats at the front. In one of them, a tall man whose plain evening dress was unrelieved by ribbon or star, Rivington recognized the statesman who had shed the blood of his own people as if it had been water.

Chapter III

THE OPERA—AND AFTER

RIVINGTON gazed upon this man with something of a sense of fascination. It seemed to him that he himself, the man upon whom he gazed, the brilliant assemblage which filled the spacious opera house, were all parts, figures, phantasies of a strange dream—a dream in which the man, however, was the dominant and most impressive actor. Something in him, as Rivington saw him, shut out all else; he revealed himself, to Rivington, at any rate, as a silent, immovable incarnation of unyielding force.

To other people—people who were unconscious of the man's identity—this individual must needs have seemed nothing more than a quietly dressed, quiet-mannered, reserved-looking gentleman, something over middle age, who regarded everything that was happening in his vicinity with unemotional observation and an air of almost complete indifference. He was a

man of height and breadth, and gave an impression of unusual physical strength, but his face, clean shaven except for a pair of whiskers trimmed in mutton-chop fashion, had a curious pallor over it which seemed to argue some form of sickness that had not as yet had time to exert its malign influence on the massive frame. There were strange contrasts in the man's face. The mouth, nostrils, and chin were heavy, sensual, cruel; on the other hand, the eyes were large, set well apart, and mild in expression; an unusually high and broad forehead conveyed an impression of benevolence and lofty thought. Rivington watched closely, hoping to see the man smile, or sneer, or do anything that would bring the muscles of his face into play and throw some light into the inscrutable eyes, but he watched in vain: the so-called Monsieur Semenoff sat like a statue, cold, immobile.

Rivington found the thought of all he had heard of this man and of his iron rule crowding thick upon his brain. So that—that very quiet, unobtrusive gentleman was the man who had turned out armed troops against unarmed and defenseless peasants, had shot men and women down like dogs, had caused young women to be stripped and flogged by a brutal soldiery, had

shot young boys, little better than children, in the open streets, had crushed, with a brutality that had turned Europe sick with horror, every attempt of his own people to struggle upward and onward to freedom and liberty. It seemed impossible, looking at that high white forehead, that these measures of violent repression could have sprung from the brain which it shielded. But the tightly locked lips, grim, implacable, showed another side to the man's character.

Still feeling as if he were in a dream, Rivington saw ghosts all around this impassive figure. There were the ghosts of men whose garments were crusted with snow and stained with blood; of women, some of them young and beautiful, from whom the clothing had been torn, upon whose bodies, back, arms, breast, were the scars, livid, bloody, of fierce scourgings; of children, wide-eyed with terror at sight of the leveled rifles from whence, with scarlet flame and gray smoke, death was about to leap, remorseless, unpitiful, upon them. He wondered if the man saw these ghosts himself—if they ever haunted him; if that curious pallor which was spread all over his face came from some consuming sense that, sooner or later, the white faces and accusing eyes of all these victims must

rise up before him, never to be put away from his sight forever.

Then he suddenly remembered that if Miss Maxwell's theory was correct the woman he loved was to be brought here as a decoy to this man! He clenched his hands in passionate revolt.

"Uncommonly sober and quiet-looking gentleman, our friend the Eminent, isn't he, Daubs?" he heard Wells saying. "Doesn't look the truculent monster the papers make him out to be, eh? Not a very nice sort of party to tackle, though—there's a remarkable sense of watchfulness about his eyes. Looks as if he was keeping a perpetual watch, doesn't he?"

"I suppose he is," Rivington forced himself to say. He had no desire to talk—his heart was beating like a steam hammer. He was waiting—waiting to see who would come into the yet empty box.

The last chords of the overture died away—there was a quivering of fans, a rustle of silk and satins, a faint murmur of voices, and ere the conductor lifted his baton again the empty box was occupied, and Rivington found himself looking once more upon the woman for whose fate he was so deeply concerned.

Admirably self-possessed, attired in even

more exquisite fashion than when he had seen her in the theater at Rouen, Yvette took her seat in full view of the audience, while Monsieur Dubarle, dignified as ever, sat a little way back in the box. It became at once evident to Rivington, who had seen these two together before, that upon this particular evening new parts were to be played—Monsieur Dubarle was already enacting the rôle of the affectionate, indulgent parent or guardian, proud of a beautiful daughter; Miss de St. Evreux playing that of the young woman newly introduced to a world of gayety and fashion, ready to be amused, delighted, to enjoy everything, still young enough to show pleasure when she was pleased and astonishment when she was astonished, and sufficiently naïve to be not ashamed of betraying an evident affection for her companion. With the unconsciousness of innocence she immediately began to chatter with evident volubility to Monsieur Dubarle, who, much to Rivington's surprise, showed that he, too, could unbend, and could smile in such an engaging fashion as to make his features as charming and urbane as Rivington had previously seen them grim and somber.

Fascinated as he had been by Monsieur

Semenoff, Rivington, was still more deeply fascinated by Yvette. Once more he fell into a waking dream—it seemed to him that this beautiful young creature, resplendent in loveliness of a rare type, was slowly drawing all the house to her feet as worshipers of her beauty. The people upon the stage, on which the curtain had just risen, their voices, the music which throbbed behind and with their voices, all were blotted out—nothing remained but the beauty of Yvette, calling, attracting, compelling. . . .

“By George!” he suddenly heard Wells say, “she is a beauty!”

Rivington then remembered that Wells now saw Yvette for the first time. He gazed at him wonderingly, speculating in a dim, vague fashion on his friend’s thoughts. That Wells was genuinely astonished by Yvette’s charm he was quick to perceive. He also saw that Wells was somewhat puzzled.

“You are thinking—what?” he inquired.

“That she is—well, of a more vivacious temperament than I had gathered from your description of her,” replied Wells.

Rivington drew his chair nearer to his friend and farther back into the box.

“I have told you already,” he said, dropping

his voice to a whisper, "that she is not her real self. She is playing a part—playing it, I am sure, under influence."

"It seems natural enough," said Wells. "The man, I suppose, is Dubarle?"

"And he, too, is playing a part," said Rivington. "I would give everything to know what influence it is that he is exerting upon her, for that is not her real self—I know!"

"Well, there's one thing quite certain," said Wells. "She's creating a vast amount of sensation. There are more people looking at her than at the folk on the stage."

Glancing round the house, Rivington saw that this was true. Here and there lorgnettes were framed upon the box in which Dubarle and Yvette sat—he noticed that a great many people, after inspecting them, turned to their neighbors with whispered inquiries which were invariably answered by a shake of the head. It was evident, as Wells had observed, that Yvette's beauty was evoking much comment, and that people were asking who she was. He turned to the box of the Russian Ambassador—the three men seated in it were also regarding the unknown pair with a steady scrutiny. He saw the Ambassador himself turn to a younger

man, whom Rivington took to be an attaché or secretary, and ask him some question to which, it was evident, no satisfactory reply could be given. As for Monsieur Semenoff, his face was as impassive as ever. But when the first act was over and the lights were turned up, Rivington saw this man, for the first time since he had entered the box, lay hold of his opera glasses and, after looking carelessly round the house, bring them to bear upon Dubarle and his companion, who were at that moment chatting and laughing with the affectionate intimacy which exists between an admiring father and a favorite daughter.

Following Miss Maxwell's advice, Rivington and Wells—both at first somewhat timid about the success of their disguise, but quickly reassured on finding that nobody took any particular notice of them—went, during the evening, into various parts of the house. On the grand staircase, in the foyer, and about the salon they overheard many inquiries—chiefly among men—as to the identity of Dubarle and Yvette. And once Rivington caught the remark of a man who passed him talking with great animation.

“All Paris will be talking of her to-morrow!”

He was sick and wearied of all of it long before

the night was over. It was no pleasure to him to work, like a mole, underground—he would much rather have faced every danger boldly in the full light of day. The music gave him no pleasure; the brilliant crowd bored him.

“I wish you and I could have carried the thing through between us, Dogger!” he said to Wells in the privacy of their box. “We might have muddled it, but we should have muddled through, somehow, after our natural characteristics.”

But the usually impetuous Wells, who up to three days before had been spoiling, as he said, for a fight, shook his head with newly acquired wisdom.

“No, old chap,” said he, “it wouldn’t have done. This is one of those affairs which require a good deal of feminine subtlety and artifice, and you are lucky in having tumbled across them. If anybody will clear this thing up Miss Maxwell will.”

“It appears to me,” said Rivington, “that you have already formed a very high opinion of Miss Maxwell.”

“Miss Maxwell,” answered Wells laconically, “would have made a first-class commander. She knows what she’s doing, what she wants

doing, and how to have things done. I'm not clever, Daubs, but I know clever people when I see 'em—even if they're women."

They saw Miss Maxwell as they left the opera. She passed them, leaning on the arm of her companion, and looked steadily at both without showing a sign of recognition.

"Nor did she even smile at the ridiculous figure I must cut!" said Wells in a whisper. "Certainly that chap Jacques is clever, and I don't care how soon I get round to him."

There was a considerable crowd—chiefly composed of young men—at the foot of the grand staircase, and it was evident that its members were waiting to see something or somebody. Rivington and Wells wedged their way to a favorable point of vantage and waited, too. After a time came the Russin Ambassador and his two companions—the man passing as Monsieur Semenoff paused within a yard of the two friends. Rivington gave him a searching glance—now that he was close to him he saw that the pallor upon his face was like that which spreads over the features of a corpse and that beneath his eyes there were heavy shadows. For the rest, his face was as set as if it had been carved out of ivory, but his eyes, as he conversed with his two

companions, were alive with an instinctive watchfulness.

A stir among the crowd in which they stood heralded the coming of Dubarle and Yvette. He, tall and commanding of figure, made a fine presence as he came down the staircase—she, her small hand resting lightly on his arm, looked around her with an innocent indifference, as if unconscious that a hundred eyes were deliberately inspecting her. If this apparent indifference on the part of both was acting, said Rivington to himself, it was fine acting indeed. Dubarle paid no apparent heed to the people among whom they passed and looked neither to the right nor to the left—he was bending down, smiling, to offer some evidently amusing observation to his charge as they passed Rivington; she, looking up at him affectionately, showed herself to her observers as the fond daughter of a proud father. Something in the air and attitude of each seemed to indicate this relationship. Rivington almost instantly recognized that the people about him had already decided that the unknown was some rich foreigner who was showing his daughter the sights of Paris. He heard half-smothered exclamations, whispers, here and there a frank remark from one man to another,

and he recognized that Yvette's beauty had captivated everybody.

"I can't stand much more of this, Dogger," he said desperately, as he and Wells walked along the Place de l'Opéra together. "Something definite will have to be done quickly or——"

"Now, then, now, then, old chap!" said Wells. "Patience, and play the game."

"If I only could play my game!" exclaimed Rivington. "It's poor work playing somebody else's game."

"I say—patience," said Wells. He paused and looked about him. "I should say," he went on, "that as we're so marvelously unlike our real selves, there wouldn't be much harm in having a drink together. Come along, Daubs!"

Rivington, without much interest in this proposed diversion, followed Wells across the street and round the corner to the Grand Hotel.

"This'll be an excellent opportunity of testing my disguise, at any rate," chuckled Wells, as they turned into the courtyard and found chairs on the balcony. "I'm stopping here, you know, Daubs, and it's only a few hours since this waiter brought me some coffee—let's see if he knows me."

But the waiter did not know him from anybody else, and executed his order for whisky and soda unconcerned. Wells was just lifting his glass to his lips when Rivington suddenly clutched his arm.

"Dogger!" he exclaimed, "look there—this woman coming out of the hotel—there! Who is she? Isn't it——"

Before he could finish, Wells set down his glass with a sharp exclamation.

"By Gad!" he said. "It is! Madame de Marlé!"

Madame de Marlé walked down the steps into the courtyard very slowly, and at their foot paused and looked about her. She was dressed as if for walking, and wore a thick veil, but neither Rivington nor Wells had any doubt of her identity. That their own was skilfully concealed they were instantly assured. Madame de Marlé, who was evidently looking for someone, gazed along the row of men sitting at small tables along the balcony and for at least a second inspected both with a scrutinizing glance. The two were looking directly at her, and it was with considerable relief that they saw that she did not know them. Her glance passed on—she examined other faces—seemed to hesitate—was turning

away, when a man came out of the hotel, ran down the steps, and greeted her with signs of the utmost deference and politeness, exhibiting, at the same time, symptoms of his absolute desolation at the consciousness of his turpitude in having caused Madame to await him. As he turned his face in their direction after bending over Madame de Marlé's hand, Rivington could scarcely restrain an exclamation of surprise. Feeling that both the lady and her companion were looking about them, however, though with the careless glances of people who, meeting in a public place, stare at those gathered there without any definite object in doing so, he affected to be interested in selecting a cigar from his case and in lighting it.

"Dogger," he said in a low voice, "don't appear to take any notice of those two, but when you get the chance just look carefully at the man who has met Madame de Marlé. I have met him before."

He passed his cigar case over to Wells as he spoke. Wells silently took a cigar and lighted it.

"They are still standing there," continued Rivington. "Do not look round just yet—now they are moving away—you may look."

Wells turned his head slowly, with the best

imitation of languid indifference that he could assume, and inspected Madame de Marlé's companion. He saw a man whom from his appearance he took to be an Italian—a man who, to his thinking, was either a poet, a fiddler, or a dancing master—these forms of art, in Wells's opinion, being invariably associated with long hair, large neckties, and a certain picturesque get-up. When he perceived that the man was voluble in speech, that he made much use of gesticulation, and had a remarkable mobility of countenance, he came to the conclusion that his first impression of him was correct. He turned to Rivington again.

"One of your artistic friends, I suppose," he said. "What is he—a mad poet or a fiddling chap?"

"I can't tell you," answered Rivington. "I saw him once—for five minutes only—at Madame de Marlé's. That is some months ago. He is, I believe, a Pole, or a Hungarian—I don't know which—and I think I remember hearing Madame de Marlé say that he is a pianist. Dogger!"

"Well?"

"You were inclined to be suspicious about Madame de Marlé."

"I am just as much inclined to be suspicious now."

"I am not sure that I am not getting suspicious of everybody and everything," said Rivington. "But—do you think that Madame de Marlé's business in Paris has anything to do with our business?"

"It would not at all surprise me if it had."

"But what—and how?"

"Ask me something else, old chap. I confess that I am puzzling my brains considerably over a very delicate question."

"What is it?"

"Just this. If Madame de Marlé is—as she evidently is—staying at this hotel, which, big as it is, is after all a place within itself, Madame de Marlé will almost certainly encounter me somewhere, and when I have had all this beastly make-up and my false stomach taken off and have got into my own clothes Madame de Marlé will know me—and will perhaps ask where you are. And if Madame de Marlé is—as she may be, and I, personally, certainly think is—mixed up in this business, it may be awkward if she discovers that you are in Paris. For you see, Daubs, if the lady really is mixed up in it, there's one

thing that's as certain as death—she's not on your side."

"That's true," assented Rivington.

"Therefore, she must be on the other side. And Miss Maxwell is particularly anxious that the other side should not know that you are in Paris."

Rivington considered this for a moment or two. He glanced with apparent carelessness across the courtyard. Madame de Marlé and her companion were still pacing up and down an empty stretch of the pavement and were now in what appeared to be close and serious conversation. As Rivington watched them the man drew out his watch and, having looked at it, made some observation to Madame de Marlé. Both turned, and still talking walked toward the entrance which gives upon the Boulevard des Capucines. Rivington's gaze followed them closely—they turned to the right.

"Dogger," he said, "we've proved the value of our disguises—let us follow these two and see where they go. Can we manage it?"

"We'll try," replied Wells, rising with alacrity. "Here, I'll take your arm and we'll go out in deep conversation, like a couple of respectable

old fogies. We're going home, remember, much engaged in each other's talk, and looking chiefly at the pavement, but keeping a weather eye open."

"You're becoming quite a genius, dear boy," said Rivington, as they walked across the courtyard toward the Boulevard. "Quite an accomplished master of trick."

"Miss Maxwell," said Wells grimly. "Now, then, which way did these two go—port or starboard?"

"Up here—toward the Madeleine," responded Rivington.

"All right, I see 'em ahead," said Wells. "Now, then, play your part—talk any rot you like—talk about art—I don't know anything about it, but it's good enough to talk about—I shan't hear it—I'll say 'yes' and 'no' now and then, and nod my head—and keep my eyes open."

Accordingly, anyone coming from the opposite direction and noticing these two, saw nothing more unusual than a couple of elderly gentlemen, arm in arm, one of whom was tall, slender, and gray bearded, and the other short, rotund, and black whiskered, marching up the tree-fringed pavement in earnest, if one-sided, con-

versation, which the tall old gentleman emphasized and accentuated with his umbrella. But no one noticed that from beneath the broad brim of his somewhat old-fashioned opera hat the stoutish gentleman gazed straight ahead.

"They're crossing the road," said Wells, as the dark bulk of the Madeleine rose vast and massive against the stars and the sky. "To the left—slow up a bit and go on talking. There's a tidy lot of light just ahead around the corner. There, they've turned down there. What street is it?"

"Rue Royale," said Rivington. "Come on."

"Steady, till we've weathered the corner, old chap," counseled Wells. "I don't want to run 'em down. I can see 'em a good fifty yards off in this light. There they are—do you see?—on the other side of the street."

"Let us keep on this, then," said Rivington. "I won't look that way at all. You keep your eye on them. Well, to resume——"

He went on talking, or making the appearance of talking, until they had traversed nearly the whole length of the Rue Royale. Wells suddenly checked him.

"Shut up, Daubs!" he said. "They've gone!"

"Gone? Disappeared?"

"That's so," answered Wells. "Confound it! Don't stop walking, though—go on as if nothing had happened. Damn! I took my eyes off them for one second and they'd vanished. But see—they were just by that café. They must have slipped in there—must—— Ah!—look there, quick!"

Without pausing, Rivington cast a glance across the street at the café to which Wells had drawn his attention. Striding up to it, cloaked almost to his eyes, was a tall bearded man who within another moment had passed the door and disappeared up the staircase beyond.

The two friends uttered the same exclamation.

"Dubarle!"

Then Wells, Rivington having unconsciously stopped, said:

"Come on, come on! We mustn't stand there. Straight forward and round the corner—then we can talk."

They had walked some little distance along the Rue de Rivoli before either spoke. Then Wells suddenly stopped.

"I don't think there's much doubt about that, Daubs, old chap!" he said. "That's a pretty clear thing. Midnight conference between

Dubarle, Madame de Marlé, and her friend of the long hair. Possibly others."

"You're sure Madame de Marlé and the man went into that café?" asked Rivington.

"They must have gone in," replied Wells. "They were just drawing up to the door when I took my eyes off them for a second to avoid running into those people who passed us on the wrong side, and when I looked again they were gone. It's impossible that they could have got out of sight. It was brilliantly light all down the street, and I should have seen them. Therefore, they must have gone in there."

"There's no doubt of Dubarle, at any rate," said Rivington.

"There's no doubt to me that they and Dubarle are together now," said Wells. "I wish I were as sure of a fortune as I am of that!"

"What's to be done next?" said Rivington after a pause.

Wells threw away his cigar with an air of determination. He seized Rivington's arm again.

"Come on," he said. "We'll go to Miss Maxwell."

Rivington half hung back.

"What! at this time?" he exclaimed

"Pooh! it's only twelve o'clock," said Wells.

"And you know where to find her?"

"I know where to find her, and we shall probably find her busy."

He led the way back to the Boulevard des Capucines by way of the Rue du Luxembourg, and crossing over to the Rue des Mathurins presently conducted his companion to an *appartement* high up in a building of that thoroughfare. A smart maid, who, in spite of the lateness of the hour, looked very wide awake and alert, answered Wells's summons. Rivington felt that there was more mystery, more mole's work, when his companion, instead of asking for Miss Maxwell, or giving any name, drew from his vest pocket a big silver emblem of peculiar shape and exhibited it to the maid without word or comment. Within another moment they were in Miss Maxwell's presence.

Rivington glanced around him with much curiosity. The room in which they stood was large and lofty—it looked to him like a well-appointed editor's room in a first-class newspaper office. There were luxurious desks, comfortable desk chairs, bureaus of the latest pattern, telephones, speaking tubes, electric lamps. Nor were certain creature comforts absent. In one

corner of the room was a supper table, amply spread, and there was a bright fire burning in a cosy grate, and on the warm-hued hearth rug before it a great Persian cat lay coiled in happy sleep.

Miss Maxwell was not the only occupant of this room. At one of the desks, busily turning over some papers, sat one of the men whom Rivington and Wells had seen at the *Chât Jaune* in Rouen—Monsieur Simond. At another, writing, sat a middle-aged woman who might well have passed for a school mistress or a governess—a woman whose hair was arranged very simply and severely, whose gown was prim and Quaker-like, whose countenance was of the most decorous. Neither of these persons paid any attention to the two friends.

Miss Maxwell pointed to two chairs close to the desk at which she sat. Rivington noticed that she looked him and Wells over, very closely, but showed no sign of amusement or surprise at the transformation wrought by the artistes of Monsieur Jacques. Indeed, there was no sign of anything in Miss Maxwell's face but of a businesslike attention to whatever it was that was just then occupying her attention. She wasted no words in welcome or otherwise, but simply said, looking from one to the other:

"Well?"

Rivington bent forward and spoke.

"I told you of a Madame de Marlé at whose reception I used to meet Miss de St. Evreux?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Madame de Marlé is in Paris."

"Yes?"

"Wells and I saw her at the Grand Hotel to-night, after the opera. She did not recognize us. A man whom I have met—but only once—at her flat, Paradise Court, joined her. He is, I believe, a Pole—a musician, but I cannot remember his name. After some conversation they went away. We followed them to the Rue Royale—they entered the café which stands almost at the end of the street, on the right-hand side as you go down from the Madeleine. A moment later Dubarle came up from the opposite direction and also entered the café."

Miss Maxwell's brows drew together.

"Describe this woman to me, and the man," she said.

Rivington gave her a brief description of Madame de Marlé and her companion. Miss Maxwell left her desk, crossed the room to Monsieur Simond, and spoke briefly with him.

Monsieur Simond rose and went out of the room by a side door.

"You know nothing of this Madame de Marlé beyond what you have told me?" asked Miss Maxwell, coming back to the two friends. "She——"

The sharp tinkle of a bell on her desk interrupted her. She caught up one of the telephones—a moment or two later she laid it down and turned to Rivington and Wells.

"Wait here for me," she said. "I must leave you for perhaps twenty minutes, perhaps longer—on no account go away until I return, even if you wait all night. See, there is a supper table, and wine and spirits and cigars, help yourselves, please. I have just had some strange and startling news—it is probable we shall have to act, all of us, sooner than I had reckoned for."

Chapter IV

THE SPELL IS BROKEN

FOR more than an hour Rivington and Wells waited in momentary expectation of Miss Maxwell's return. Everything was very quiet in that businesslike room—the prim and proper lady continued to read documents, to make notes, to write letters. She spoke only once, and that was when she seconded Miss Maxwell's invitation to the two young men to refresh themselves. No other person entered the room, and as neither Rivington nor Wells cared to converse in the presence of a third party, this period of waiting passed slowly for both. But at last, the time then being nearly two o'clock in the morning, Miss Maxwell came hurrying back.

That she was deeply concerned about some serious matter was evident to both Rivington and Wells. She gave them a short, sharp nod of the head as she came in, and with one word, "Wait," sat down to her desk and immediately

began to write a letter in cipher, the code book of which she produced from her pocket. She was occupied in this task for some time; finally she touched one of the many electric buttons which stood ranged on a board at her side. A man whom the two friends had not seen before appeared in the room; to him Miss Maxwell confided the letter which she had just written, after briefly speaking to him in a language which neither Rivington nor Wells understood. Then leaving her desk she went over to the supper table and with the aid of a spirit lamp prepared herself a cup of coffee. Carrying this to a quiet corner of the room she beckoned Rivington and Wells to join her. As they took seats near her, Miss Maxwell produced a cigarette case and lighted a cigarette.

"I am the least little bit tired," she said, "a cigarette and some coffee will pull me together. I have still a good deal to do to-night. Now, before I tell you what I wish you to do, I want to ask you, Mr. Rivington, to give me a little more information about Madame de Marlé, of whom we were speaking before I went out."

"Yes," replied Rivington. "But that may be difficult."

"Because you know so little of her?"

"Exactly. Remember, I scarcely know anything of her."

"But you say you have gone to her house a great deal during the past twelve months?"

"Yes, almost every Sunday—of late, I think, every Sunday. Yet even now I know little of her."

"I suppose you simply saw her in the capacity of hostess, moving about among her guests?"

"Just so—she divided her time and her attention very fairly. I do not think I ever had more than a few minutes' *tête-à-tête* conversation with Madame de Marlé at any time. She would have a word with you when you presented yourself, and perhaps you would chance to find yourself near her in the course of the evening, but taking things all together, she devoted herself to nobody in particular and to everyone in general."

"You took it, I suppose, that she liked to have young, clever, bright people about her, and took an interest in bringing them together?"

Rivington hesitated a moment before answering this question. He was thinking of what Madame de Marlé had said on the occasion of the midnight visit paid to her by Wells and himself.

"Madame herself remarked to me, the last time I saw her, that there was nothing she so much disliked as that her receptions should be regarded as—as—— How did she seem to put it?" said Rivington, turning to Wells.

"Didn't want them to drop into matchmaking affairs, I think," said Wells. "Said all that sort of thing always led to such a lot of bother. That was the hang of it, anyway."

Miss Maxwell smiled.

"But I suppose there were mutual likings formed in spite of the music and the conversation and of Madame de Marlé," she said. "You never went to Madame's except on the occasion of these Sunday evening gatherings, Mr. Rivington?"

"No," replied Rivington, "except on the evening when Wells and I went together to inquire if Madame de Marlé had any knowledge of Miss de St. Evreux."

"And you do not know, of course, if Miss de St. Evreux ever went there—say, on Wednesday evenings, when she was always free of her duties at the Willoughbys?"

"No, I do not know that."

"That she was not there on any one of the four Wednesday evenings previous to her departure

from London we are very well assured," said Miss Maxwell reflectively. "Of Miss de St. Evreux's existence prior to the first of these evenings we were not aware. She only came into our field of vision through and because of Dubarle. Well, just one or two more questions. I may as well tell you that three of us who believe that we know everybody of note who is in league against our employer have seen Madame de Marlé to-night in company with Dubarle and the man who met Madame at the Grand Hotel. Dubarle we know, of course. None of us know Madame de Marlé or the other man. Yet it is sufficient to arouse suspicion against them when they are found in his company. At present we cannot do anything as regards them; they are not within our province as yet, whatever they may do. But as regards Dubarle, he is already arrested."

Both Rivington and Wells started at this sudden and unexpected announcement.

"Arrested!" they exclaimed simultaneously.

"Exactly—and in very safe keeping. He is under lock and key—at the Russian Embassy."

"You work swiftly and surely," said Rivington, after a pause, during which he and Wells

looked at each other and Miss Maxwell calmly sipped her coffee. "It is—a little terrifying."

"We cannot take unnecessary risks, nor stand at nice questions," answered Miss Maxwell. "Nor can we always wait while ordinary legal forms are gone through—we have, in dealing with such people as Dubarle, to use our wits and to strike, as you say, swiftly and surely. You see, Monsieur Semenoff, imperturbable as he looks and utterly unconscious as he showed himself to-night, recognized Dubarle in spite of the fact that he had not seen him for twenty years. And Monsieur Semenoff, on whom so much depends just now here and elsewhere, cannot afford and is not disposed to have a man like Dubarle loose in Paris while he is here. And therefore, Monsieur Dubarle was very quietly and effectively arrested an hour ago as he walked from the Rue Royale toward his flat, and he is as safely immured as if he were in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul."

Rivington could not suppress a shudder as he heard the name of this terrible prison pronounced so glibly by Miss Maxwell. He looked at her wonderingly and with anxiety in his eyes and face.

"But Miss de St. Evreux?" he asked.

"Is, I hope, sleeping soundly," replied Miss Maxwell, glancing at a clock and showing some disposition to yawn. "She is quite safe, and before to-day is over will, I trust, be much safer—and under your roof."

"Under my roof?" exclaimed Rivington, looking as if he could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears. "Under my roof?"

"For the present, yes, under your roof at Charenton. Now, listen carefully, for I must send you away in a few minutes. I told you that we already have an agent in the household which Dubarle has set up. His absence to-morrow morning will be explained in such a way that everybody in the house will think that he has left Paris on important business which will keep him from home for twenty-four hours or so. Therefore no one will be alarmed and no questions will be asked. It so happens that I, in my character of Miss Virginia Steyne, have accepted an invitation to lunch with Miss de St. Evreux to-morrow, and subsequently to go out shopping with her, and the great probability is that I shall take the opportunity to carry her off to your villa at Charenton, where we shall decide on what to do next."

"But——" began Rivington.

Miss Maxwell raised her hand with a gesture of authority.

"I can't go into details or give explanations," she said. "You must do as I tell you. Leave everything to me and I think you will find that all will go well. Now, within a few minutes you must leave here."

"In our disguises?" inquired Wells.

"In your disguises. You, Mr. Wells, must not return to your hotel, but must accompany Mr. Rivington to his villa at Charenton. There is a closed brougham waiting for you downstairs in which you can make the journey. You had better get some sleep on arriving, but at ten o'clock you will both proceed to the Convent of Notre Dame at Courbevoie and will hand this letter to the Reverend Mother. The brougham will be at your service for this journey also, but you can by that time have rid yourselves of your disguises. I think Etheredge will be able to help you. The Reverend Mother at the convent will introduce you to Sister Teresa, an Englishwoman, who will accompany you in the brougham to your villa. There you will all three wait for me—or for news of me. That is all—now, good-night, or, rather, good-morning."

Miss Maxwell rose without another word, crossed the room, opened a door, and revealed to the two young men a staircase.

"Go down this, open the door at the foot of the stairs, and you will find the brougham awaiting you in the courtyard. There is no need to speak to the driver—his instructions are complete. Enter—close the door—and he will drive you home."

Then Miss Maxwell went back into the room which they had just left. Rivington and Wells, without another word, followed her instructions. Within another minute they were being driven eastward at a smart pace.

Each was so surprised by the events of the evening that it was not until they had been carried for some considerable distance through the sleeping city that they spoke.

"I should like to know what the end of all this is going to be, Daubs, old chap," said Wells at last. "It is a most extraordinary business."

"The only end that I am concerned with and wish to arrive at," answered Rivington, "is the safety of Miss de St. Evreux. For the rest I care nothing. And it seems to me that that end is in sight."

"There's one matter puzzles me tremen-

dously," said Wells, after another pause. "And that matter can be summed up in three words—Madame de Marlé."

"Do you know, Dogger," said Rivington, "I don't attach any great importance to the presence of Madame de Marlé in Paris. It's quite possible that she is a friend of Dubarle's in quite an innocent way—they may be very old friends or acquaintances. In that case, what more natural than that they should meet—should sup together?"

"Umph!" said Wells skeptically. "But considering that we know what we do know of Dubarle, I can't think it possible that anybody who met him as Madame de Marlé did is not mixed up in his affairs."

"Remember—she and her companion proceeded to the café in the Rue Royale quite openly," said Rivington. "No—I really don't see that there is anything to justify us in accusing Madame de Marlé of any complicity. I think we shall find when we get Miss de St. Evreux safely back to England that Madame de Marlé will be one of the readiest in congratulating her on her escape."

"We've gone through so much that's curious and mysterious," said Wells, "that nothing, I

think, could astonish me now. However, there's to-day to get through yet. I suppose the next thing is an hour or two's sleep, some breakfast, and then this convent. After that—well, I wonder what will happen!"

Before noon the two friends, now in their natural semblance, were in the presence of a kindly faced, apple-cheeked old lady who was apparently in expectation of their coming and asked them to sit down in the plainly appointed reception room of the convent while she read Miss Maxwell's letter. "Yes, that was quite in order," she said with a smile, "if Messieurs would rest tranquil but for a few moments Sister Teresa would join them." And presently Sister Teresa, a big, self-assured, sharp-eyed Englishwoman of some fifty years, who looked fit to command a regiment of Guards, joined them in company with a businesslike portman-teau and a formidable umbrella, and without delay all three were quickly on the way to Charenton.

Rivington tried to draw Sister Teresa into conversation on the subject of Yvette de St. Evreux. But beyond stating that Yvette was a good child Sister Teresa evinced no desire for

conversation, and very soon, with a slight apology and the remark that who knew how much her time might be occupied during the rest of the day, she pulled out a book of devotion and set herself to reading.

All that afternoon Rivington and Wells, from a convenient coign of vantage in the garden of the villa, kept a lookout along the road that led through Vincennes from Paris. Inside the house Sister Teresa, after an inspection of the two womenservants, walked up and down the hall reading her book. She was quiet enough, but Rivington was in a fever of suspense.

At last, just after four o'clock, Wells's alert eyes saw a closed motor *coupé* coming in the distance at a swift pace, and within a few minutes he was able to recognize the chauffeur as a man in Miss Maxwell's employ. A few minutes more and the *coupé* turned into the grounds of the villa, and Rivington found himself face to face with the girl for whose rescue he had worked so untiringly. And as he looked at her, as she stepped down from the carriage, closely followed by Miss Maxwell, he recognized, with a sudden burst of almost stupefying knowledge, that this was the real Yvette—the Yvette he had known

in London. She looked dazed, mystified, half afraid, but she knew him and gave him her hand.

"You will help me?" she said, looking at him with something of a child's wistfulness. "I—I am in trouble—something—I cannot understand yet—but——"

Then she caught sight of Sister Teresa, and with a little cry of thankfulness at the recognition of a well-known and trusted friend she hurried forward into her old *gouvernante's* arms. She and Sister Teresa disappeared within the house.

Rivington and Wells, still standing on the steps, turned to Miss Maxwell. They saw that her usually rosy-cheeked face was pale and that she looked as if some recent experience had been trying and exhausting. But Rivington, at that moment, in spite of all his gratitude to this woman, could think only of the other. He involuntarily laid his hand entreatingly on Miss Maxwell's arm.

"What is it?" he cried excitedly. "What has happened? She is changed, she is herself as I knew her in London. She is not what she was at Rouen, nor as she seemed to be last night at the opera. Why did she seem so changed at Rouen—

so changed in a different way, last night—and now like her old self again? What is it—what is the reason?”

Miss Maxwell answered in a low, hushed voice, looking alternately from Rivington to Wells.

“The reason is this,” she said. “Dubarle was shot at the Embassy at three o’clock this afternoon—killed, you understand?”

“What—murdered?” exclaimed Rivington.

“No, shot by Semenoff in self-defense. It seems that he suddenly attacked, overpowered, and rendered unconscious the guard who had charge of him, and who had entered the room in which he was confined in order to take him some cigars. From this room he very stealthily made his way to one of the principal apartments, and in this he was about to conceal himself. It so happened that Semenoff entered this apartment at that very moment. He is always armed, always on the alert, always suspicious. He recognized Dubarle, drew his revolver, and shot him dead on the spot. The curtain has fallen on Dubarle forever—and the spell by which he had bound this girl to him—why, I do not yet know—is equally forever broken.”

PART THE FOURTH
IN PARIS AND IN LONDON

Chapter I

ACCORDING TO THE DOCTORS

IT SEEMED to Rivington, regarding the prospects of things a few days after Miss Maxwell's rescue of Yvette and her astounding announcement of the sudden and tragic death of Dubarle at the hands of the man who was posing as plain Monsieur Semenoff, that they had only assumed bright tints for a momentary space in order to be almost instantly overclouded again by darker ones. To see Yvette enter his own roof—a temporary roof though it was—under the charge and protection of her old friend and governess, Sister Teresa, had yielded him a sensation of intense pleasure. And sorry though he was to hear that a man like Dubarle, a man, despite his record, of evident great intellectual attainments and of many personal attractions, should have been shot down like a dog, he could not avoid a feeling of deep conviction that his death meant the salvation of the woman whom he, Rivington, loved. Yvette's rescue—her present safety—

the removal forever from the scene of the man who had of late appeared to dominate her life—these three facts were mighty agents in lifting Rivington from what had been almost depths of despair to regions of glowing hope. And then, with rude and shocking suddenness, he had been thrown back again into a miserable middle state, a state of suspense, a state that was neither of hope nor of fear, but of wretched uncertainty. For before Yvette had been under his roof many minutes it became evident that in some strange, subtle degree her mind was affected.

It was Sister Teresa who made this startling discovery. Having known Yvette from the time she was a child until she quitted the convent, a young woman, she knew her better and more intimately than Rivington could know her. And Sister Teresa, after safely bestowing her charge within the little villa, was quickly in conference with its master and with Miss Maxwell and with Wells in the garden outside. She was a woman of resolution, courage, and ideas, accustomed to command and to receive implicit obedience, and even Miss Maxwell felt that here was a mind that in this matter, at any rate, would and must dominate her own.

“Now, Mr. Rivington,” said Sister Teresa

with a quiet but unmistakable note of authority, which Wells was quick to catch and to appreciate, "it is very evident that here is work for a clever physician, and we must have him brought here at once."

"You do not mean that Miss de St. Evreux is ill?" said Rivington, in great surprise.

"I mean that she has had some terrible mental shock and is suffering deeply from it," replied Sister Teresa. "What it has been, how it has been received, who caused it, or what caused it, I don't know, but I have no doubt at all of its existence and its present effect. We must have a physician, a specialist, at once. You are a rich man, Mr. Rivington, you would wish to have the best advice?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" replied Rivington eagerly. "Never mind that, Sister Teresa—anything that will—— My God, this is awful news! You do not really think that—that——"

"I will not say what I think until we have heard what those who are competent to decide may tell us," answered Sister Teresa. "We will hope. But now, listen, can you not fetch Dr. Barrère here in your motor car? See, I have written down his address. He is the greatest man of the day; tell him that I have sent you to him.

It is possible he may bring a colleague with him—you will have room?"

"Plenty," answered Rivington. "Come along, Wells, you must drive. Let's get off—it maddens me to be doing nothing."

But Wells was already on his way to the coach house where the big De Dietrich stood ready for use at a moment's notice. He was calling for Etheredge as he ran—Etheredge, who invariably anticipated necessities and occasions, appeared as from the clouds on the instant.

"What do you think of what Sister Teresa says?" asked Rivington of Miss Maxwell as they followed the more nimble Wells. "Can it be true?"

She shook her head very gravely.

"I am not surprised at Sister Teresa's conclusions," she said. "I feared something of the sort myself."

"Listen!" said Rivington, a sudden thought occurring to him. "Does she know of Dubarle's death?"

"Not a word!" replied Miss Maxwell. "No one knows but those of us who are in the secret."

"Then it couldn't have been the shock of that," said Rivington meditatively.

"I'm not sure," remarked Miss Maxwell

with a shake of her head which seemed to mean a good deal, "that it wasn't the shock of that."

Rivington stopped and stared at her incredulously.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "More mystery. But—how could it be—how could——"

"Jump in, Daubs!" commanded Wells, bringing the car alongside. "Jump in, we'll be into Paris in no time."

"Yes, go," said Miss Maxwell, seeing Rivington still in a state of wonder. "Get the doctor over, then we shall hear."

Outside, on the high road, with the car forging ahead at a pace which at any other time would have drawn a remonstrance upon Wells, Rivington said:

"I wonder what we shall hear—I wonder what we shall hear!"

But Wells, with all the senses alert which had more than once carried him and those under him through murderous-looking dens, made no answer. It was his duty just then to fetch the help which Sister Teresa had demanded, and he had the sailor's instinct which forbids interference with the man at the wheel. But later in the afternoon, when he had safely piloted the famous doctor and a brother physician of almost equal

celebrity out to Charenton, and had waited with Rivington and Miss Maxwell while they visited Yvette, he listened eagerly enough to what Dr. Barrère had to say. And when he had listened and heard, he remarked to himself that the mystery in this matter seemed to be deepening.

Dr. Barrère was a tall, portly, clean-shaven man, with a leonine head on his shoulders and the ribbon of the Legion of Honor in the lapel of his frock coat. His companion, Dr. Sarcy, was his opposite in appearance—a little active, dapper gentleman with a very black beard, trimmed to a fine point, a high forehead, and keen eyes. Each of these famous physicians was obviously interested in the case to which their attention had been called—and it seemed to Wells that each was a little curious.

“I need hardly say to you, gentlemen,” Rivington eagerly began when the two consultants returned in company with Sister Teresa, “that we are all deeply anxious to hear what you can tell us.”

Dr. Barrère inclined his massive head to one side and polished his spectacles with a handkerchief of delicate and daintily embroidered cambric.

"I am of opinion, sir," he replied after a moment's pause, "that this young lady is suffering from the results of what—so that you may gain some idea of my meaning—of what, I say, I will call hypnotic suggestion."

"You mean," said Rivington with a beating heart, "that she has been hypnotized?"

Dr. Barrère inclined his head to the other side.

"I mean, sir," he answered, "that she has for some time recently—how long I cannot say—been under the influence of powerful mental exertion from without—that, as you say, she is a victim of hypnotism. In that, I believe, my worthy friend and colleague, Dr. Sarcy, concurs."

Dr. Sarcy bent his dapper figure almost double.

"Of an absolute certainty, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "And there is an interesting question which, with my revered colleague's permission, I would put to you, who are all, I believe, the dear friends of this young lady. Has it, then, been noticeable that of late she has not been herself—not been herself as you have known her?"

"My colleague's meaning," interpolated Dr. Barrère, "though perfectly clear, may be fur-

ther conveyed in another question of similar import—has the young lady of late appeared to have been of a changed nature?”

“Yes, gentlemen, yes, most certainly!” replied Rivington, with much insistent eagerness. “She has not seemed to be herself.”

“And this further change—a return to, at any rate, some consciousness of herself,” said Dr. Barrère, “dates from, I understand, a particular hour this afternoon. Just so. Now let us sum up the facts. According to what we have heard from the patient herself and her friends, this young lady has no clear memory of any events which have recently happened——”

Rivington uttered an exclamation of astonishment. He stared at the two doctors with supremely astounded eyes.

“No memory of recent events!” he burst out. “Then how——”

Dr. Barrère polished his spectacles again with the dainty handkerchief.

“The patient’s last recollections,” he said smoothly, “are of a house and a family in London, wherein she fulfilled the duties of governess to some children of whom she seems to have been very fond and whose parents were very kind to her. She does not know when or why she left this

eminently desirable house. She does not know why or when she came to Paris. What she does know is that to-day, about the hour of three in the afternoon, she suddenly awoke, as it seemed to her, from a sleep in which she had experienced many confusing dreams. She was astounded to find herself in Paris, in elegant apartments, and to hear herself addressed by an unfamiliar name. It was fortunate that she was in the company of the young lady, Miss Maxwell, whom I believe myself to have the honor of seeing here, and who immediately conducted her to friends whom she could know and trust—to the good Sister Teresa, and to Mr. Rivington, who is doubtless the young lady's guardian."

"I hope, sir, to be a better guardian than she has ever known," said Rivington fervently. "But tell me—am I to understand that Miss de St. Evreux knows nothing at all of what has happened to her during the last eight days?"

"Nothing at all," replied Dr. Barrère. "And that of course has led me to a certain conclusion with which my esteemed colleague, Dr. Sarcy, agrees fully."

"Absolutely," said Dr. Sarcy. "My revered colleague is right."

"That conclusion is," continued Dr. Barrère,

“that our patient has for some time—indefinite, but from the evidence about nine or ten days past—been the subject of hypnotic suggestion, that some unusually powerful mind has, as it were, driven her real self out of her and supplied a false self, a self which would be as wax in the hands of the stronger mind, even to the point of complete obsession, and that the reign, the domination of that mind over hers came to a very sudden end to-day, with the result that she suddenly woke, as out of sleep, or a trance, and just as suddenly became herself again as she had just suddenly become—something else.”

Amid the silence which followed this statement Rivington rose and took one or two turns about the room. He stopped at last before Dr. Barrère.

“What event could possibly bring about such an extraordinary change?” he asked in a voice husky with emotion.

Dr. Barrère’s head inclined first to one side, then to the other.

“I should say,” he answered dryly, “nothing but death.”

“You mean the death of the influencing person?” suggested Rivington.

“The sudden death of the influencing person,”

replied Dr. Barrère with emphasis. "The sudden death, you understand. The stream of influence which had been brought to bear upon the receptive faculties of this young lady—who is naturally of a highly strung, nervous, imaginative temperament—was, as I hold, suddenly cut off at its very source, with the result that we——"

"What a devilish, a damnable influence to possess!" exclaimed Rivington, with heat and passion. "And such things really exist—there are people in this world who can really exert such influences?"

Dr. Barrère's eyebrows arched themselves.

"We have long been familiar with many strange instances of the power of mind over matter, sir," he answered. "We are beginning to learn a little in these days of the power of mind over mind."

Rivington, who had begun pacing the room once more, again confronted the doctors.

"Then how soon will Miss de St. Evreux be herself again?" he asked.

"She is herself again as regards her memory of events previous to a date which we make out to be quite recent," answered Dr. Sarcy, "and she knows where she is and with whom, and is tranquil. Whether she will ever know what has

happened during this time of obsession we cannot tell. It may be well," he added, with a significance which was kindly and sympathetic, "if she never does remember. In the meantime, sir, she is under the best care she could have." He indicated Sister Teresa with a bow.

As Rivington turned back from the gates of the villa after seeing Wells drive away Parisward with the two specialists he encountered Etheredge, who emerged from a side walk of the grounds. He knew at once that the valet had something to confide, and went into the side walk to meet him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Etheredge quietly, "it is well that you should know, sir, that this house is being watched and that the young ladies when they arrived here this afternoon were followed!"

Chapter II

BENEATH A BUNCH OF ROSES

AFTER having had so much experience of the strange things that were happening around him, Rivington was not at all astonished to receive this communication from Etheredge. But he was just then so much concerned in reflecting upon what he had heard from the doctors that news like this, which seemed to threaten further troubles and complications, was by no means grateful to his ears, and he uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"I should not intrude this news upon you, sir, if I had not good grounds for believing it to be true," said Etheredge, in his usual placid fashion. "It is my sincere belief, sir, that you personally have been under observation ever since we left Rouen."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Rivington. "Was there ever such a tangle of mysteries? Speak out, Etheredge, tell me everything you know. Here, we will turn into this summerhouse—now, speak."

"Well, sir," said Etheredge in a low voice, "I have naturally kept my eyes and ears open during the recent course of events. You will remember, sir, the day of our departure from Rouen!"

"Quite well, Etheredge! It seems to have taken place, that departure, about ten years ago, but it is in reality only a few days since," replied Rivington with a bitter laugh. "Well?"

"When we left Rouen that day, sir, I had reason to believe that our departure was watched. My reasons were these. I had that morning and the evening before also observed a man who appeared to be an artist—a man in a knickerbocker suit of a rather large check pattern—who carried an easel, a camp stool, an umbrella, a portfolio. I was first attracted to him on the evening of my arrival from Paris. He was sketching, or professing to sketch the view along the quay sides from the curb of the pavement outside the Hôtel d'Angleterre. I contrived to steal a swift glance at his work as I passed him from behind, and it at once struck me that whatever else he was, he was no draughtsman—not even a feeble amateur. The sketch block was a mere pretense—in my opinion. It gave him an opportunity for lingering near the door of the hotel."

"Well?" said Rivington, making no comment. "Go on, Etheredge."

"When we left Rouen, sir, this man was on the platform—sauntering carelessly about. He glanced at us as we passed him—just as he might have glanced at anyone else. He also traveled with me in the same train to Dieppe—I saw him in the refreshment room on the quay there, which, as you are aware, sir, overlooks the landing stage at which the boats arrive and depart. But he did not depart with us. He remained behind."

Rivington uttered an impatient exclamation.

"But really, Etheredge," he said, "coincidence, you know—but go on—finish your story."

"I am aware, sir," continued Etheredge, "that coincidence is long of arm. I was about to say, however, that when we arrived at Calais the other morning this man joined the train there, as if he had been waiting for the arrival of some person whom he had expected."

"Very likely he had," observed Rivington. "He had most likely come along the coast from Dieppe. Even a bad artist might love the sea line, Etheredge."

"Precisely, sir. The man traveled to Paris in our train, sir, and passed us, quite casually, as

we were driving away from the Gare du Nord. And now——”

“Really,” interrupted Rivington who was anxious to join Miss Maxwell and consult with her, “I don’t see much in it, Etheredge. But you hadn’t finished—I beg your pardon—you were going to say——”

“Only that the man is here, sir.”

Rivington started, staring at the valet in surprise.

“Here!” he exclaimed. “Here! Where?”

“Here in Charenton, sir. If you will give yourself the trouble, sir, to look through this little window, you will see—if you look between the poplars, sir—a little hotel across the road facing the villa—the Hôtel de la Paix. The man is staying there.”

Rivington glanced through the little window at the back of the summerhouse. There across the sunlit highway stood the modest establishment of which Etheredge spoke. It had green jalousies in a yellow wall; its front door was ornamented by two cypress trees set in large red pots; over the front door and the garden cypresses was a canopy in red and white stripes; under the canopy were a few chairs and little tables, and in the sun outside an ancient sheep dog, fond

of warmth now that his days were coming to an end, lay fast asleep on a patch of parched grass. It was a peaceful picture and suggested anything but mystery and espionage. Rivington turned mechanically from contemplating it to looking at Etheredge.

"Well," he said, this time feeling that the valet was likely to be right in his surmises.

"He arrived here yesterday morning, sir, when you were out. He set up his easel near the church there—with a clean canvas on it. He dawdled between it and the hotel for some time. Then he left the easel in charge of some children and went round the village. His *déjeuner* occupied a long time at the hotel—I do not think he had done much at his canvas when evening came. Then he carried everything into the hotel and there stayed the night. There he was this morning, regarding various scenes from various stand-points. And this afternoon, when the young ladies arrived——"

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Rivington. "You said they were followed."

"When the young ladies arrived this afternoon, sir," said Etheredge, "their car was followed by a young man who rode a motor bicycle. He passed the car at a very swift rate as it

turned into the gates of the villa, then circled around the village green—as we should call it in England, sir—at a gradually decreasing pace, as if its rider wished to examine his surroundings, until he came to a stand at the door of the hotel, where the man whom I have already spoken of was sitting under the canopy. There was nothing to show that these two had ever met, but when the host brought out wine for the newcomer he saluted the other, as strangers will, out of politeness, in this country, sir, and they presently fell into conversation and began to fraternize, with the result that the younger man soon removed his bottle and glass to the first comer's table. After a time they strolled across the green toward the church, as if to examine it, but came back in a few minutes and called for another bottle. They were there until Mr. Wells returned from Paris in the car, and they looked at the two doctors with interest, and soon afterward the younger man mounted his motorcycle and went off along the road. As for the first comer, sir, he is still there, in the hotel, drinking with the host and some others.”

Rivington felt troubled and perplexed. He could not deny that there was good ground for Etheredge's suspicions. The fact that one of

these men had been seen at Rouen, at Calais, and in Paris under circumstances which seemed to argue that he was keeping an eye on them; the further fact that he had turned up there at Charenton; the still further fact that the car in which Miss Maxwell had conveyed Yvette to the villa should have been so closely followed by a man who entered into conversation with this presumable spy, all tended to disquiet him, and to agitate a mind already troubled by many strange problems. He thanked Etheredge for his watchfulness, asked him to keep eyes and ears open, and returned to the villa.

But that night as he and Wells and Miss Maxwell, Sister Teresa being in close attendance on her patient, sat talking Etheredge's news over and discussing future plans, it seemed to him that the mystery which surrounded Yvette, and which, he had fully hoped, would have been entirely dissipated by the death of Dubarle, was as impenetrable as ever.

"I do not know what to do," he said, half unconsciously. "If these men are watching, why are they watching? It is as if one were in a net."

"I know what I should do, Daubs, old chap," said Wells determinedly. "I should make tracks

for England as soon as ever Miss de St. Evreux can go out with the car, and let's be off for Calais. Get her back to London and into the capacious bosom of the Wisden Willoughbys. That's the best and wisest thing you can do. I don't think much mystery will penetrate into Cumberland Terrace."

"It will certainly be wise," said Miss Maxwell slowly and thoughtfully, "to get Miss de St. Evreux back to England. There is one thing I can assure you of positively, Mr. Rivington—if these men who seem to be spies are spies they are certainly not of our service. You might have thought that since Miss de St. Evreux had been seen in Dubarle's company, and since he was known to a select few of us, we should have still kept an eye on her, but that is not so. She has been in my charge entirely, and I have worked everything with a view to her safety and comfort ever since I found that she was not an accomplice but a dupe. Who these people and the people behind are I cannot think. However, let us be practical. In three days I shall be ready to leave Paris; if you like, I will return with you as Miss de St. Evreux's companion. We will all go together in your car as far as Calais

—there will be room for everybody and for Etheredge, too.”

“That’s a ripping idea!” said Wells enthusiastically. “What do you say, Daubs, my boy?”

“That I can never sufficiently thank Miss Maxwell for her kindness,” answered Rivington. “Yes, we will go as soon as Miss de St. Evreux is fit to travel.”

But he knew, from what Sister Teresa had told him, that Yvette was still suffering from whatever terrible experience it was that she had gone through, and that some time must elapse ere she would regain her former self in all its true nature and strength. And in this knowledge he was further confirmed next morning when Sister Teresa, after many injunctions, admitted him to a brief audience of her charge.

Yvette looked as people look who have just awakened from a strange dream. But she knew Rivington, and her cheek warmed and her eyes lightened as she gave him her hand.

“You are feeling better, Miss de St. Evreux?” he said, venturing to retain her hand and—careless of Sister Teresa’s presence—looking into her eyes with all a lover’s ardor.

"Yes, Mr. Rivington," she answered with one of the frank yet shy glances which he knew so well. "I am much better—much better—because I know I am safe here. But I—I want you to understand that I cannot yet realize—I have—it is as if I had slept and dreamed and——"

"Ah, it is well I remained on guard!" said Sister Teresa. "Fie, then! did I not command that you should not talk of these things as yet? A word more and I drive Mr. Rivington out of the room."

"What, then, shall one talk of, Sister Teresa?" said Rivington with a laugh.

"Talk of?" replied Sister Teresa, taking out her knitting. "Talk of the blue sky there, or the garden, or of the flowers, but of nothing serious, or I shall prove myself terrible!"

But at that time she scarcely allowed them to do more than exchange a few words. Yet the interview made Rivington exquisitely happy, for he had touched Yvette's hands, and looked into her eyes, and seen her smile, and the mere sight of her had for the moment driven all thought of danger out of his head.

But that danger was present, nearer than any of them dreamed, they were presently reminded

in a fashion which they were not soon to forget.

It was on the third morning after Yvette's arrival at the villa that Wells, coming down into the little breakfast salon at an early hour, found Rivington looking at a parcel wrapped up in brown paper—a parcel of about the size of a cardboard box such as bootmakers enclose their wares in. On the table at his side lay a magnificent bunch of roses.

“Look here, Dogger,” said Rivington, looking up with a puzzled expression. “When I went out into the garden this morning I found these things on the shelf in the porch—this bunch of roses, and lying beneath it, this parcel. The parcel is addressed in French, as follows: ‘A little present for the sick English lady.’ Chocolate, I suppose. How sympathetic these people are, and what a delicate way of doing little attentive things they have! But I am wondering who can have sent it, for who knows that Yvette is ill?”

“Exactly,” said Wells. “Left in the porch, you say?”

“Left in the porch. The roses were fresh with the morning dew.”

Wells strolled round the table and glanced at the address on the parcel. Rivington, who was smiling with gratification at the thought of this

polite attention, shook the parcel a little in his hands as if estimating its weight or guessing at its probable contents.

"Heavy, isn't it?" he said. "There must be at least two pounds of chocolate. What are you doing, Dogger?"

Wells had suddenly snatched the parcel from Rivington. For one second he held it to his ear; then with a loud shout he made a dash for the open window behind them and leaped headlong into the orchard beneath it. Holding the parcel at arm's length he raced between the fruit trees to the farther end of the orchard and, coming to a low wall which shut it in, flung the parcel over it into midair. Then he fell back against a tree, gasping and waiting.

Rivington, leaping from the window, had raced after Wells. But ere he reached the end of the orchard a sudden roar, a great shock, seemed to arise from the bowels of the earth. It flung both men to the ground, and behind them they heard the crash of breaking windows. In the silence that instantly followed they rose to their feet and rushed to the wall. Beneath the wall, at a great depth, lay a disused stone quarry, in the midst of which they had on the previous day noticed an empty cottage and workshop. There was a

curiously colored mist of smoke and steam hanging over these old buildings; when it cleared away they saw that scarcely one stone was left standing on another, and that the débris had been blown to all parts of the quarry.

Chapter III

WARNING TO QUIT

IN THE silence which followed the horrible roar and detonation of the explosion, a thrush's clear note suddenly rose, high and triumphant, from the orchard behind them. The pure, full-throated strain sounded to Rivington like a pæan of thanksgiving. He pulled himself together, and mechanically lifting his hand to his forehead found that the sweat was running from it in streams. He looked at Wells. Wells was extracting a cigarette from his case, but Rivington saw that his hands trembled and that his face had lost its usual fresh color.

"Close shave, Daubs, old chap—that," said Wells. "A nice mess it would have made of all of us—your doll's-house villa into the bargain!"

Rivington grasped his friend's hand, wringing it in silence. Wells affected to be concerned with his cigarette, which he had now managed to light.

"You've saved all our lives, Dogger!" he said at last.

"Oh, rot!" answered Wells. "Anybody would have done that—the only thing to do, you know. Lucky I remembered that old quarry—couldn't have had a better place to tip such rubbish into."

"But how did you discover what it was?" inquired Rivington.

"Easy enough. When you rattled it I heard a slight—the very slightest whirring sound. It didn't stop—it went on as I ran with it. Something like a clock running down. And knowing a bit about machinery as applied to explosives and that we were just now going through some queer experiences, I—well, I put two and two together in a jiffy, with the result we've seen. Hullo! I thought the neighborhood would be roused!"

Looking around him Rivington perceived that the quarry had suddenly become the center of attraction to the whole village. People were gathering about the fences, hedges, and walls which enclosed it, peering down into its still smoke-obscured depths with wondering eyes—a chorus of exclamations denoting all shades of astonishment filled the morning air and drowned the thrush's song. Down a lane which ran at the side of the villa came running officials—a soldier or two, a policeman or two, and with them a

stout person who appeared to be somebody. All were in frantic haste.

"Now, we shall be in for some questioning," remarked Wells. "Look here, Daubs—we don't know anything, you know. Walking in the orchard in order to get an appetite we were suddenly dismayed—and knocked down—by this terrible explosion, and on recovering our senses and looking over into the quarry we find the old cottage blown to bits, eh? How's that for a yarn? I think it's scarcely advisable to talk of—bombs, eh?"

"All right," answered Rivington. He bowed courteously to the stout gentleman, the officials, the policemen, the soldiers who from the lane at the corner of the orchard surveyed the scene of devastation. As Wells foresaw, the stout gentleman—who proved to be the owner of the quarry—immediately began to ask questions. Had the gentlemen—whose orchard lay on the confines of this quarry, the scene of a so remarkable, a so extraordinary outrage, seen anything? Ah, the gentlemen had heard the so appalling sound and had suffered the indignity of being violently thrown to the ground? And after recovery had seen the now ruined habitation and the formerly made-useful workshop blown to atoms. Just

heaven! Unbelievable! Was it, then, a thunderbolt that had caused this most incredible affair, in which, however, no lives appeared to have been lost and no injury done of any moment? For what else could have occasioned an event so unheard of? Do quarries suddenly blow themselves up? No! The cause, then, my children! An earthquake? (This from a soldier who in his hurry had evidently got into a comrade's coat.) Pouf! there had been no shock. A flash of lightning? (This from a policeman who had put his hat on wrong way first and was brandishing his scabbarded sword.) But who had seen it? No, it must have been a thunderbolt, a bolt from the blue, direct from——

“If I may be permitted to offer an opinion, sir,” said Rivington, with his fine air of courtesy, “I would venture to suggest that a simple explanation of this event may be found. Monsieur, when working this quarry, doubtless made use of explosives?”

“Of explosives? Truly, yes! To detach large masses of the stone—great, prodigious! Ah, explosives, truly.”

“Then it is possible,” continued Rivington, “that some explosive had been left in the old cottage, sir, and that by some cause unknown to

us it was suddenly discharged this morning. Workmen are sometimes careless in leaving these things about."

Monsieur had more reason than ever. Truly, that must be the proper explanation. For see, where else could such a thing that said Bo-m-m-m! like a cannon, have come from? What happiness that there was no damage done save a little broken glass—easily mended. Not even a goat killed. Ah, the poor goats!—sometimes they were tethered on the green patches in the quarry. But it was yet too early for their attendance. Well—well, let us to our coffee again, which we were just about to drink when that terrible voice said Bo-m-m-m! A thousand, thousand thanks to monsieur for his suggestion so reasonable, so sensible. Ah, those pigs of workmen, to leave unnoticed a so dangerous a thing as an explosive—imbeciles!

To Sister Teresa and to Yvette Rivington permitted himself to offer the same suggestion as to the cause of the broken window and the violent shaking which the villa had received. But to Miss Maxwell, who arrived shortly afterward in her motor from Paris, he gave a full account of what had really happened. She

heard him in silence, and her usually vivacious face grew grave.

"This is more serious than I had looked for," she said. "It is evident that you or Miss de St. Evreux or both have some implacable enemy. But what I wish to know is—for what reason?"

"I have been wondering," said Rivington, "if the sudden disappearance of Dubarle has anything to do with this. Do they—I don't know what I mean by them, unless it is some society of which he was a member—do they connect her with his disappearance—think that she has, for instance, betrayed him? That would supply a motive for such an outrage as that which Wells's presence of mind frustrated this morning."

"Yes," replied Miss Maxwell, "but I have never known—it is not within our knowledge—that Dubarle (which I told you, you know, was only an assumed name) was ever a member of any society, secret or otherwise. What he did years ago he did on his own initiative. And yet——"

"Yes?"

"It is plainly evident that some person, or some body of persons, has an earnest desire to

kill Miss de St. Evreux. It is also evident that she was followed here, whether by the men whom Etheredge suspected—he was probably right—or by others is immaterial. It is very plain that she is known to be here by the persons who wish to do her an injury.”

“Do you think they will try further means?” asked Rivington.

“I should say they will,” replied Miss Maxwell. “They seem to be a determined set, judging by the affair of this morning.”

Rivington paced the room in great agitation.

“What is to be done?” he exclaimed. “One cannot go on forever with this perpetual fear hanging over one’s head! Death were better than such a fate. Why, if Yvette once knew of this it would drive her mad!”

“Look here, Daubs,” said Wells, who had so far listened in silence. “Let’s get across to England, as we agreed to do the other day. Get Miss de St. Evreux safely lodged with the Willoughbys—there’s something remarkably safe and solid looking about themselves and their house. And then, as soon as you can, or can persuade her to agree, marry Miss de St. Evreux and settle down in peace.”

Miss Maxwell listened to this sage advice in

silence. Rivington shook his head almost despairingly.

"If these people cherish so much hatred for an innocent girl," he said, "the mere fact of her marriage won't check their desire of vengeance. And where can one escape from them, if they have—as they seem to have—the power of tracking one down wherever one may go?"

"That chap who has been staying at the little hotel across the road has departed, by the way," said Wells.

"Gone!" exclaimed Rivington.

"At an early hour this morning—too early for the event. Etheredge has been making casual inquiries of mine host," replied Wells. "The gentleman packed his traps and went off—ostensibly toward the Belgian frontier—at somewhere about six o'clock. But for anything we know he has left some innocent-looking customer in his place."

"What is really wanted," said Miss Maxwell, "is to find out the reason of all this. It may be that some secret society has some reason for desiring Miss de St. Evreux's death. If we could find out that reason we might perhaps find out much more."

"What of the authorities at the convent at

Courbevoie?" suggested Rivington, who remembered that he himself was still in the dark as regards Yvette's antecedents.

"There is nothing to be learned there that I have not already learned or that Sister Teresa upstairs could not tell us just now," replied Miss Maxwell. "I made it my business to ascertain all that before I arranged for Miss de St. Evreux's rescue. No—she was taken to that convent when quite a child by a man who, representing himself as her guardian, informed the authorities that her parents were dead, and that, as he himself was going to some distant country and might never return, he wished them to take charge of her. He paid there and then for her educational and boarding expenses for a term of twenty years in advance, left a considerable sum for her clothing and incidental expenses, and in addition deposited with the authorities certain legal documents which showed that he had invested with a Parisian banker the sum of fifty thousand francs which, principal and interest, was to be handed over to Miss de St. Evreux on her marriage or her attaining her twenty-sixth year. She was six years old when she entered the convent, and it was stipulated that at eighteen, if she wished it, she was to be free to go

into the world—which she did, as a governess. So that you see the man, whoever he was, fully provided for the child until she was twenty-six, and further made arrangement for the handing over to her at that age of a nice little nest egg.”

“To me,” continued Miss Maxwell, “there does not seem to be any great mystery in this—I have heard of similar cases. There are just one or two facts, however, as related to me by the authorities at the convent, which seem significant—one is that the man had no papers to show with respect to Yvette’s parentage, and explained this by saying that her parents had died suddenly abroad and that all their personal belongings had been lost in a fire; the other, that he gave no name himself at any time to anyone, but paid all the money in French currency—in notes and gold. Yes—there is one more fact of significance, of which Sister Teresa could also tell you—Yvette as a child had some recollection of a country which seems to have been Russia, and of a city which seems to have been St. Petersburg, but these recollections were so indistinct and hazy that she soon forgot them among her new surroundings and within a few months never spoke of them. That, Mr. Rivington, is all that is to be learned at the convent.”

“Miss Maxwell,” said Rivington, “does it not strike you that these particulars, in which you say you do not see any great mystery, rather point to the fact that, mystery or no mystery, Yvette may be the offspring of some house of Russia, of some noble family, which has incurred the hatred of the disaffected? Is it not a fact that the innocent children of such families have at times been tracked down with sleuth-hound-like determination, so that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the sons—ay, and on the daughters? You know how they hunted the children of the emigrant aristocracy here in France in the days of the Terror, even if they returned to the country as simple democrats.”

“Yes,” replied Miss Maxwell, “it is possible. But—how can we further probe the mystery which hangs around Miss de St. Evreux’s antecedents? I cannot see that it is possible.”

“Then is she forever to hang under this cloud—this awful terror?” exclaimed Rivington.

“Ah, but at present she does not know of it!” replied Miss Maxwell. “Let us hope she never will. And now let us think of how we can get her to England with least danger to her and ourselves.”

Wells heaved a sigh of relief.

"That is the wisest—the only plan," he said. "Because, I say, look here—how do you know that if we remain here much longer we shan't have one of those infernal bombs thrown into the villa or planted under the table? Let's get off—one can breathe in England."

Discussing these matters still further it was finally decided that Yvette should that morning be removed by Sister Teresa and Miss Maxwell to the convent at Courbevoie, and that she and Miss Maxwell should next day travel from thence to England in the garb of Sisters of Mercy. As for Rivington, Wells, and Etheredge, they, on Miss Maxwell's suggestion, were to repair later in the day to Paris and to place themselves in the hands of Monsieur Jacques for purposes of disguise. They were all to travel by the same train and to keep an eye on each other, but to hold no communication with each other save in case of strict necessity. And so the little villa at Charenton was that night tenantless, and the De Dietrich was stabled in Paris; and next day nobody would have recognized Etheredge in the character of an ascetic High Church clergyman, nor Miss Maxwell as a plump-faced, blue-spectacled, middle-aged *religieuse*, nor Yvette in the plump-faced nun's pale and sad compan-

ion, nor Rivington in the rather Hebraic-looking gentleman with a full beard, nor Wells—who swore deeply under his breath all day—as the horsy-looking groom of the red hair and red side-wing whiskers who was condemned to second-class accommodation and to perpetual chewing of a straw. But in spite of discomfort and disadvantages they were thankful to see the chalk cliffs of Dover, and later on the dinginess of the London suburbs, and it was with a very thankful heart that the Hebraic-looking gentleman, lounging about in search of some luggage which could not be found and had no existence, saw the two black-robed, white-hooded sisters enter the humdrum safety of a four-wheeler and drive away from the whirl and bustle of Victoria.

It was the real Yvette de St. Evreux—real, save for the cloud which still hung over her mind—who was welcomed and made much of in Mr. Wisden Willoughby's drawing room that night. But neither she nor any of the people assembled about her would have been very comfortable had they known that she had not been in the house ten minutes when a certain domestic employed there, making an excuse to slip out for a quarter of an hour, hurried away to the nearest

telegraph office and dispatched a message to an address in the West Central district—which message was couched in these apparently insignificant words:

“She is here.”

PART THE FIFTH
PARADISE COURT

Chapter I

THE LONG ARM

FINDING at the end of a week that nothing had occurred which seemed to threaten the further safety of Yvette, Rivington readily entered the wide-opened gates of the paradise of fools. Naturally of a highly optimistic temperament, he had an ineradicable belief that in England nothing happens which is not English. To him, in spite of a certain cosmopolitanism imported into his nature by much traveling, it seemed impossible that secret plots, intrigues, dark doings in dark places, could take place in his own country. He had looked upon it as being quite a natural thing that any event of such a nature should happen in a country separated from our own by a mere strip of water. There was something, he believed, in the English air, in the moral atmosphere of these favored islands, which made it impossible for secret machinations to go on here. And so, as day after day went by and

Yvette remained safe and sound in the bosom of the Willoughby family, his spirits rose until they wove about his brain a feeling of assurance which became almost a spirit of defiance.

"It's just here, Dogger, old chap," he said, addressing Wells as they sat at dinner one evening; "it's all very well talking, but that sort of thing isn't done here. How often do you ever hear of any of these secret societies, and so on, ever doing anything in this country? This is the land of personal safety, Dogger!"

"Hear of lots of people suddenly disappearing who are never heard of again, anyhow," replied Wells.

"Possibly—but chiefly, I think, among what we may, without any offense, call the lower classes," said Rivington. "It is a rather common thing, I believe, for the ne'er-do-weel sort of gentleman who gets tired of his wife to leave her some fine morning and to disappear so completely that he is never seen again."

"It's not an uncommon thing, either, judging from some of these wretched Sunday newspapers that you have in London, to hear of people being found murdered without the slightest clue to show who murdered them," retorted Wells, "and I don't think that's confined to your so-called

lower classes either. Don't you get too cocksure, Daubs, about this business—it's the easiest thing in the world, so I've heard wiser men than I am say, to be never sure. For anything you know, the danger that's been overhanging Miss de St. Evreux may still be there."

"I think not, dear old chap, I think not," said Rivington. "I have a sort of instinctive feeling that it is past. There would be something so very—shall we say incongruous?—in anything happening to anybody who lived under the Wisden Willoughby roof; it is surely a living example of the grandeur of the fine old saying which informs us that the Englishman's house is his castle."

"That's sentimental rot," said Wells calmly. "Get off that horse, Daubs, for heaven's sake, and get on to another."

But Rivington only laughed. He was thinking of the solidity, the truly English middle-class weariness of the Willoughby *ménage*, wherein the atmosphere was as respectable and as commonplace as the oak and the mahogany. He could not conceive it possible that dark deeds should be done within those four square areas of severe convention—the picture of an assassin with an infernal machine, even with a revolver, in Mrs.

Willoughby's drawing room, struck him as being as ridiculous as it was anachronistic. One might as well think of finding Guy Fawkes there, he said to himself, as of encountering either tragedy or romance behind those massive, high-commerce-suggesting doors.

In and out of those doors Rivington passed a good deal during the first days of the return to London. Mr. Wisden Willoughby was a man of kindly and hospitable nature, a little wearying, perhaps, because of pompous bearing and garrulous tongue, but genuinely sympathetic in this very romantic case. As for Mrs. Wisden Willoughby, she was still breathless with amazement to think that these dreadful and mysterious adventures could have happened to one who had acted as governess to the little Willoughbys—it made her think, she said, of all the dreadful stories she had heard of Siberia, and the Man in the Iron Mask, and the Bastille, and many other matters which she did not definitely refer to, but hinted at darkly. To her essentially feminine eyes Rivington appeared a godlike young Perseus who had delivered a new Andromeda from a dragon which was all the more horrible because it was unknown. Therefore, while Mr. Wisden Willoughby pressed Rivington

to dine, she pressed him to come to afternoon tea, and thus it was that he spent much more time in Cumberland Terrace than at his own rooms.

As the days went by, his belief that Yvette cared for him increased until it became a certainty. It had been the desire of the Willoughbys that she should rest after her experiences in Paris, but she had insisted on taking up her duties exactly where she had so suddenly laid them down, and the family physician, privately consulted on this point, gave it as his opinion that she should be humored in her desire. The even tenor of the way of the Willoughby establishment was accordingly resumed—with the important alteration that Rivington's presence was frequently added to it. Mrs. Wisden Willoughby, womanlike, contrived in somewhat obviously designed fashion to throw the two young people together. More than once Rivington openly took Yvette into the park outside, she seeming to accept the fact that Mrs. Willoughby was quite complaisant in these arrangements. And more than once he was tempted to ask her the question which was always ready on his lips, but he kept the temptation down, for he recognized that Yvette was not free of the

strange shadow that had so unexpectedly stolen across the path of her life.

He had ventured to make some reference to the Paris episode once and had been troubled at the effect. A strange expression had come into the girl's eyes; her brows had drawn together, an atmosphere of wonder and doubt and vagueness had stolen all over her. It seemed as if she were one who was trying to remember a dream dreamed long since and could find nothing of its fragments but such as set up thoughts of fear and horror and uncertainty. And she had turned to him with an entreaty which he recognized as childlike in its simplicity. "I cannot recollect!" she said. "It is—I do not know what it is—please do not ask me yet, for I feel—somewhere—that I shall remember everything at last, and understand everything. And then I shall tell you everything of my own will."

With that Rivington was well content. He could wait. He was seeing the woman he loved daily; every day showed him something more admirable in her; every day found him more in love with her; and, in spite of anything that Wells might say, every day added to his sense of security. Was it likely that the enemy would linger in striking when there were daily oppor-

tunities of doing an injury to either himself or Yvette if such an injury were intended? He began, in his optimistic fashion, to encourage the belief within his own mind that the incident of the bomb throwing at Charenton had borne no direct relation to the story of Yvette and himself, but had possibly something to do with the fact that Miss Maxwell was a secret agent of the Russian police. It might be, he argued, that some section of Nihilists or anarchists, having knowledge of Miss Maxwell's profession, and having traced her to the villa, had intended to destroy her—destroying the other people of the house at the same time, as an unavoidable necessity. This new and ingenious theory he put before Wells, who contemptuously dismissed it as mere rot and besought his friend not to let his wits go a-wool-gathering.

“Miss Maxwell,” observed Wells, “is so clever that it's not a bit likely there's a single soul outside her own profession who knows what she is—except ourselves. No, that theory won't do, Daubs. I believe the infernal thing was meant for Miss de St. Evreux.”

“You must remember that there are always traitors in these affairs, my dear boy,” said Rivington. “It is a dangerous profession,

that which Miss Maxwell so capably adorns, and——”

“She isn’t going to adorn it such an awful lot longer, anyway,” said Wells. “She’s had about enough of it, and that’s what I think, too.”

Rivington was suddenly conscious of a great illumination. He examined his friend’s face and clapped a hand on his shoulder.

“By George! Dogger,” he exclaimed, “I believe you’re in love with Miss Maxwell! Aren’t you now?”

“I’ve been pretty badly gone on her ever since I met her on the Dieppe boat,” Wells said bluntly. “I should think anybody could see that who wasn’t as blind as a blessed owl.”

“Or so much wrapped up in his own affairs as to be quite insensible to those of other people,” admitted Rivington regretfully. “Dear, dear me! Well, I congratulate you, dear boy, most heartily—I suppose I may congratulate you?”

“I think it’s a solid fact,” answered Wells. “I haven’t been twiddling my thumbs in idleness while you were up at Cumberland Terrace. And I wanted to tell you—she and I are going to motor down to her father’s place on Saturday

to spend the week-end—the old boy's a parson, you know, in Leicestershire—so I'll have to leave you for two or three days. But you seem to feel yourself pretty safe now, Daubs, eh?"

"Absolutely safe, Dogger! I believe that all danger is past. Well, well—Miss Maxwell! I'll tell you, Dogger, we'll all be married together."

But on the Saturday when he had seen Wells and Miss Maxwell start on their journey to the Midlands he reflected that he was not yet betrothed to Yvette, and he was filled with a sense of impatience so strong that he determined to speak to her when he went to Cumberland Terrace next day. It was evident to him that she was becoming more of her normal self every day. Might it not be that a definite pronouncement on his part would help in clearing her mind of the shadow? for he was increasingly sure of her affection for him, and it seemed but natural to suppose that the assured knowledge of his for her would be a new source of strength to her.

It was Rivington's intention to spend that Saturday evening quietly at home in his own rooms, and after dining at his club he went back to the Albany with no other object in his mind than the carrying out of this peaceful

project. He had arrears of correspondence to clear off, papers to look through, the proofs of an article to correct. And behind all these quiet occupations there would be the perpetual background of Yvette—roseate-hued, golden with hope, to gaze upon.

That evening about half-past nine Etheredge requested permission to go out for an hour. Rivington accorded it readily. There was nothing, he said, that he would want, and it was not likely that anyone would call; but before the valet had gone ten minutes there came a summons at the outer door, and Rivington was obliged to leave his desk and answer it himself.

Rivington instantly recognized the man who stood in the lobby—he was Fritz, the big fellow at Madame de Marlé's, who had caused so much speculation and wonder in Wells's mind. He presented himself at Rivington's door as the model of a quiet, well-trained servant; there was no trace of anything but politeness in his unemotional face and steady voice. He held out a letter to Rivington with a bow.

"From Madame de Marlé, sir," he murmured.

Rivington bade the man enter. In the soft light of the hall lamp he read the message conveyed in the note.

"DEAR MR. RIVINGTON:

"Poor little Marini has been taken very suddenly ill here to-night, and the doctor thinks he cannot live many hours. His great desire is to see you before he dies. Will you come to him?

"Yours sincerely,
"ADÈLE DE MARLÉ."

Without pausing to think or to consider, and only remembering the always-grateful eyes of the little Italian whom he had so often befriended, Rivington hurried into a light overcoat, snatched up a hat, and bade Fritz accompany him. All thoughts of Madame de Marlé's curious appearance in Paris, of her undoubted dealings with Dubarle, were blotted out of his mind; he thought only of poor Carlo Marini, and once arrived at Minobar Mansions he hurried Fritz along the corridors at a swift pace.

Everything at Paradise Court looked just the same. There were the curious gate, the garden, the porch with its salon and its flowers. They passed in; they went along the passage. At a certain door Fritz paused. He opened it; he drew back.

"Will you please to enter, sir?" he said with his usual formal politeness.

Rivington stepped into a room, the interior of which was concealed from him by a screen which stood in front of the door. He had only crossed the threshold when he heard the door close sharply behind him. A key was turned heavily. And then the sickening, heart-crushing consciousness burst on him—he was trapped.

Chapter II

THE TRIBUNAL

DURING the days of Rouen and Paris Rivington had felt fear more than once—that sickly, dreadful fear which turns a man's blood cold and melts the marrow in his bones—that fear of the imminent, the unseen, which may be nearer than the thing upon which one's hands could be laid by stretching them out. But he had never known such fear as that which laid itself upon his soul as he stood there between the door and the screen, knowing that the former was locked upon him and wondering what the latter hid. It was so arranged that it closed in all the rest of the room. He could see nothing, nor could he hear anything. There was a dead silence in the place—a silence as of a tomb. He felt it—felt as if, from the busy life and bustle, the lights and glare of the crowded streets outside, he had suddenly fallen into the grave—to be secured there forever.

He suddenly moved forward and thrust one

compartment of the screen roughly aside, and on seeing what he saw, the sweat burst out upon his forehead and rolled down his face in a stream.

The room was a cell—a dungeon. He knew that it was a room in Madame de Marlé's Paradise Court, that it stood next to the sky at the very top of such an essentially modern and commonplace pile of buildings as Minobar Mansions—but it was a cell for all that. He might have been in a prison, might have been in the Bastille of evil memory, in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul of ill repute. He was in none of these places—he was *there*.

He folded the screen up, placed it against the wall, cursing the cruelty of those who had made such malignant and fiendish use of it, and proceeded to make a careful examination of his prison. He found himself in a room of about twelve feet square in height, width, and length. Beyond a screen and a straw mat thrown carelessly down in one corner there was not a scrap of furniture in the place. The floor was of cement, hard as adamant; the unpapered walls were of the same material. There was neither fireplace nor window; high up in one angle of the room was a grate, utterly beyond his reach. Projecting

from the wall, also beyond his reach, was the bracket of an electric lamp. In all the rest of this dungeon-like apartment there was nothing. He walked around the walls—there was not even a crack in them at the angle where they joined the floor.

Rivington turned his attention to the door and to what he could see of its fastenings. His heart sank as he saw that the door itself was of a strength which he had not anticipated. It was of oak, heavily clamped with iron, and there was not the slightest sign of a lock or a bolt about it—a circumstance which showed him how securely he was imprisoned. He pressed his weight against it—he might as well have endeavored to move the Tower of London.

Rivington needed none of these evidences to prove to him that he was in a terrible position. He cursed his own folly in so blindly following Fritz into a trap. Why had he not thought of possible treachery—hemmed in, as he had been, by treachery and intrigue and would-be murder for so long? Then he clenched his fists and thought of Madame de Marlé. So she was in this plot, this vile, strange conspiracy, after all? He saw now that she had been in league with Dubarle, that she had known all the time of the fact

that Dubarle had carried Yvette away to France, that she probably was at the head and front of this matter. For who that could keep a cell like that in her own house, there in the heart of London, and could thrust into it, by the vilest of tricks, a man who had been her guest, could fail to be at the heart and brain of whatever undertaking she was concerned in?

A sudden thought flashed into Rivington's mind and forced a groan of utter despair from him. They had trapped him, a man, with ease; how easy it might be for them to trap an innocent girl like Yvette! There were times when she was out alone—supposing some officious excuse were made to her to the effect that he, Rivington, was ill—dying, and must see her at once—how easy it would be to decoy her instantly into a cab, drive her here, and throw her into a hellish place like this which he was now pacing like a newly captured wild beast! It drove him to the verge of madness to think of her being thrust into such a living tomb. He pictured her horror, her fright, the terror that would—yes, yes, it would destroy her reason.

“She would go mad!” he said between his set teeth. “She would go mad!”

Lest madness should come upon himself, he

began to think of what might be about to happen. For aught he could see to the contrary, the walls of that cell might be the silent witnesses of his death. He had not been brought there to Paradise Court for nothing—of that he was certain. No one knew he was there. He had left no word for Etheredge. He remembered that, in passing the porter's box at the Burlington Garden end of the Albany, the porter was not there; consequently the porter did not see him leave in company with Fritz. It might be that the porter had seen Fritz enter and that on hearing the outcry which Etheredge would certainly make when he, Rivington, was found to be missing, would remember that a big, military-looking, obviously German manservant sort of person had passed in soon after Etheredge had gone out. But how would the porter know that Fritz had gone to his, Rivington's, rooms? It was plain enough to him now that these people had watched until they knew that he was alone in his rooms. If they had exercised enough ingenuity to do that, they could have exercised enough to ensure that nobody saw Fritz go to the rooms. No, he could see no hope of rescue anywhere. He felt in his pockets for the treacherous letter which had brought him there, hoping that he had

thrown it down on the hall table, and that Etheredge might find it there—no, worse luck, there it was and in its envelope. It was no good—nobody would know that he was a prisoner at Madame de Marlé's.

He looked up at the grate, high above him in the wall, wondering if it overlooked the street. But he could hear no sound of the street. It struck him with a new sense of his awful position that there, in the very heart of London, he could hear nothing of London's voice—not even that subdued murmur of it which no walls or shutters or closely drawn curtains can shut out. It seemed then to him that he was indeed buried alive, for he had never before known London's voice hushed to silence.

Rivington looked at his watch. Half-past ten. Good God! he had not been in the place an hour—not three quarters of an hour! Was he, who had never suffered a moment's curtailment of liberty in his life, to be fastened up there like a rat in a trap for—how long? Yes—how long? He looked at the door as if he would tear it forcibly away—he suddenly calmed himself and went over to the straw mat and sat down on it to wait. How long Rivington waited, sitting on the straw mat, he never knew, for, before he had sat down

many minutes, the light set high above him in the wall went out suddenly and left him in darkness. His situation was then more horrible than ever. He did not know what to expect, but it seemed to him that he was expected to pass the night in this terrible blackness, not knowing at what moment the cell door might not open on violence and murder; and, for some reason which he could not explain, he shifted the position of the straw mat to another corner of the cell—that facing the door—and sat down again, waiting.

It was some time afterward that he heard a curious metallic click in the wall above him. There was nothing to be seen in a darkness so profound, but a slight reflection told him that the clicking sound was the result of a sudden sharp closing of the grating through which air was admitted to his prison. He sat up with a beating heart and asked himself why it had been closed. Did they mean to—to suffocate him? If not, why did they close the only aperture through which he could obtain air? Yes—that must be it. He was to be suffocated.

He began to calculate upon the length of time he would have to live and how long it would be before he became insensible. He endeavored to estimate how much air the cubic space of the cell

contained, and wondered if the process of dying in this manner was very painful; and, while he was thus engaged, he became conscious of a strange, curiously subtle aroma, sweet to the scent, sharp to the eyes, which was slowly stealing into his prison, and seizing him by nostrils and throat.

He started up with a fear more horrible than any he had yet known gripping him at the heart. What was this mysterious, ethereal substance that was gradually flooding the place? It made him think of an operation that he had once undergone, wherein the doctors had given him some anæsthetic which had seized upon him exactly as this was doing. He remembered that, in that operation, when the anæsthetic was first applied he became conscious of a curious tingling in the tips of his fingers, that this feeling then asserted itself in his feet, that he gradually came to a state in which he began to float away from the people and the voices round about him.—Great heaven!—the same feelings were beginning to assert themselves now. So he was not to be suffocated but anæsthetized—and he made a despairing effort to reach the door in some final wild hope of tearing it down, of getting away

from the steady oncoming of this sickly sweet odor which was gradually beating him down as it poured into his cell from its mysterious source. But ere he had taken one step he sank back on the straw mat and, all unknowingly, passed swiftly and surely into unconsciousness.

He had no means of knowing when it was that he came to himself. Whenever it was, he found himself lying on the straw mat, conscious that the cell was filled with pure fresh air and that he was drawing it into his lungs in great gasps. He stirred a little and something metallic rang out sharply close by him—upon him. He lifted his hand, moved his feet—and then discovered that he was in chains.

One wrist was chained to the other—he judged by moving his arms that between each wrist there was about a foot-and-a-half's length of chain. A similar length seemed to separate the shackles which had been fastened about his ankles. He could therefore move his hands a little and indulge in a shuffling walk, but that was all.

What was to happen next? It was evident to him now that he had been anæsthetized in order that his captors might make themselves more

secure in their hold upon him—with those shackles on him he could do nothing.

He lay there in the darkness for what seemed to be some time longer, though it was difficult to tell how time passed under such conditions. No sound came to his ears, but that he might expect the presence of his jailers at any moment seemed to him a probability because of the fetters on his feet and wrists.

A sudden click heralded the turning on of the electric light. Rivington's eyes, blinking under its harsh glare, at last were able to search the cell and to examine himself. He saw then that near the straw mat some hand had placed a pitcher of water and a small loaf of bread. He also made himself acquainted with the fact that his fetters were apparently of the finest steel and that he might as well expect to break into the Bank of England as to break them.

He drank greedily of the water but could not bring himself to touch even a mouthful of the bread. A hundred confusing thoughts raced through his mind. He wondered if Etheredge was searching for him; if Etheredge was communicating with the police or with Wells; if there was any chance of his rescue. Then he thought of Yvette. Was she safe? If they could seize him in

this way, these people, what could they not do with regard to her. For anything he knew she might already be in danger—be dead.

A sudden turning of a key in the door, a sudden clicking of hidden bolts brought him staggering to his feet. Two men, one of them Fritz, the other the man who had talked with Madame de Marlé in the courtyard of the Grand Hotel in Paris, entered. The second man spoke with a decidedly foreign accent.

“Follow me, Monsieur, without hesitation,” he commanded.

“Not until I know where I am to be led,” said Rivington.

The two men silently produced revolvers—the second man spoke again: “I say once more, Monsieur, follow me!”

Rivington bent his head. He stepped after the man—Fritz closed in behind him; once outside the room half a dozen steps brought them into the famous salon wherein Madame de Marlé had held her Sunday receptions. It was just the same in appearance, except that, at the farthest end, three chairs were set behind a table. In these chairs sat Madame de Marlé, a man whom Rivington did not know, and the woman whom he had known at Rouen as Madame d’Andelys.

The faces of these three were dark, sinister, implacable.

But Rivington scarcely gave them or the room a glance. He was suddenly conscious of one thing as soon as he crossed the threshold, and the consciousness smote the iron so deep into his soul that he cried out in agony. There, chained and guarded like himself, he saw Yvette.

Chapter III

VOICES FROM THE DEAD

“THIS is an outrage!”

It was Rivington who spoke, but if he had been asked to swear to the identity of his own voice, he would have felt a vast uncertainty in refusal or compliance. He was scarcely conscious that he did speak. When he heard the words which his baked lips and his dry tongue formed it seemed to him, as far as anything could seem in him, that he heard the voice of a ghost, speaking from a far distance. And it was not the ghost of a man, but of the mere animal in man, trapped securely, speaking out of an environment of despair and horror.

“This is an outrage!” he heard the voice say again.

The three people at the table who, since his entrance, had been conferring together in whispers finished their conference and looked up. Madame de Marlé spoke, fixing her eyes upon Rivington.

“Calm yourself, Mr. Rivington,” she said. “It is not usual to apply such terms as outrage to justice.”

“Justice!” the far-off hoarse voice said. “Jus——”

“Again I say, calm yourself. Take your seat—there. Let the woman be seated, too—there.”

Rivington, pressed into a seat by the strong hands of his guards, resigned himself to physical forces greater than his own. He glanced at Yvette—she, guarded by two men in whom he recognized regular frequenters of Madame de Marlé’s, but whom he had, until then, believed to be innocent musicians incapable of more than a modest mastery of their art, had taken the seat assigned to her, and was gazing around her with frightened and uncomprehending eyes. It seemed to him that she was more puzzled, more astonished than frightened, and he gathered from that that she had escaped the horrors of the prison cell through which he had passed. He noticed that she was dressed in a walking costume—she must, then, have been waylaid in the park or in the street. Her glance strayed round to him, and her lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears, and he saw that, manacled though she herself was, she was looking at his own chains.

The sight of her distress nerved him like a tonic, and he pulled himself together, and in defiance of all there, leaned, smiling, toward her.

"Courage, Yvette!" he said, calling her by her given name for the first time since he had known her. "Courage!"

Then he turned to the three at the table, and his natural voice rapidly gathering its normal strength, he said, "I repeat once more that this is an outrage, and I demand to know why Miss de St. Evreux is brought here and treated in this abominable fashion."

"That, Mr. Rivington," replied Madame de Marlé, "is precisely what we wish to tell you. As for yourself, you find yourself in your present position because you have, of late, mixed yourself up in affairs with which you had nothing to do. As for the woman, she is where she is because she is who she is."

Rivington felt as if a hand of ice had been placed upon his heart. What secret was he to hear? Inwardly full of terrible dread, he endeavored to put a bold face on matters.

"That, Madame de Marlé, is language of the vaguest," he said, affecting to sneer. "You would be more merciful if you were more explicit."

"Mercy, Mr. Rivington, is a quality, or,

rather, a weakness, which has long been unknown to me. Do not expect to find mercy anywhere within this place, for it does not exist here. Justice does," said Madame de Marlé, "and justice will be done. And now prepare to listen to what I have to say to both of you—to you, an interfering Englishman, and to you, child of devil's breed——"

Yvette's voice, gentle, pleading, interrupted her.

"Madame de Marlé, I never wronged you! How could I—I who never had any but kind thoughts of——"

Rivington interrupted Yvette in turn.

"Hush, Yvette!" he said. Then turning to Madame de Marlé, he said, "Though we are your prisoners, there is no need to treat us with insolence. Let us hear what we are charged with, Madame—tell us what it is that you have to say to us."

He had noticed that the looks which the three bent upon himself and his fellow prisoner varied in character. Upon him they looked as if he had been some unwelcome, blundering guest whose presence was a nuisance; upon Yvette they glared, all three, as if they would have fallen upon and rended her to pieces. And he began

to comprehend dimly that he was about to hear something of which he had never dreamed.

“You are right, Mr. Rivington,” said Madame de Marlé after a pause. “I will not waste myself in useless invective. I will tell you the truth instead, as dispassionately as a cold-blooded historian—in spite of the fact that my heart is on fire with the fire of the iceberg—the keenest fire of all. Listen, then, both.”

She touched her lips with her handkerchief, hesitated a moment, and then proceeded in a steady voice:

“Long years ago in a certain town in Russia, Mr. Rivington, there was a certain man who, because of the bad conditions of government in that country, had the power of life and death over the people whom he, as representative of the Czar, was supposed to protect as well as to govern. You, who live here in a free country, under laws which you yourselves make through your duly-elected representatives, can have no conception, no faint idea of what it is to live in a country like Russia, where no man is anything unless he is of the army or the police. This man, the governor general, was head of both in this town, and he exercised his prerogatives as many such men do—for his own end. And he was no

better than a brute—nay, he was not so good, for a brute is not perpetually hunting after its own pleasure, its own animalism, and this man was. He was a monster!”

Rivington was listening with intense interest—an interest so great that it seemed to drive much of the fear out of his heart. He glanced at Yvette—she was watching Madame de Marlé with dilated eyes and slightly parted lips. The two people at the table were impassive save for this fact, that in their eyes burned a smouldering fire, a light of concentrated resolve which was far more terrible than any display of emotion.

“In that same town,” continued the hard, level voice, “there dwelt a family of good birth—a family which, when this monster first went there, was living in an old house in the neighborhood of the university, whereat every one of its members was engaged. There were five members of that family—you are looking upon three of them to-night. The other two—one, long, bitterly long, years ago! the other but a mere matter of days since—were murdered—assassinated by a man whom you have seen!”

“Semenoff! And Dubarle was your brother!”

The exclamation burst involuntarily from Rivington’s lips. It seemed to him as if it had

been forced clean from the middle of his heart. And as he uttered this cry the veil which had wrapped so much of his recent life began to part—and through its slowly opening curtains he saw vague, dim shapes which he feared to look at.

“We will speak of Semenoff, and we will speak of Dubarle, and we will speak of Madame d’Andelys, and of Madame de Marlé,” continued the hard voice. “One name is as good as another in these cases. But you are right in your conclusions—myself and Madame d’Andelys and Dubarle were sisters and brother. This gentleman (let us call him Monsieur d’Andelys) was my sister’s husband—my dead husband made the fifth of that little family circle. You see now what that circle was—Monsieur and Madame d’Andelys, Monsieur and Madame de Marlé, and Monsieur Dubarle, brother to all. We were all engaged, I tell you, at our beloved university. Our hearts were wrapped up in our teaching. We spent our spare time in reading, in music, in pleasant conversation, and we loved to see our friends. We were happy in those days: certain human feelings had not been crushed out of us.”

Rivington had forgotten his own position. He was listening to the story of a life’s tragedy. It

may be that the woman saw something of this in his face, for a new note came into her voice.

“It is not live people who are speaking to you: these are the voices of the dead that you hear through me. We are all dead—I—these two—those others. Dead—but able to sit in judgment. With us to-night sit two ghosts—the ghosts of my husband and my brother. Look at them, too, as you look at me!”

Yvette covered her face with her chained hands. She uttered something like a sob. Madame de Marlé gave her one flashing glance and went on—“We were very handsome women in those far-off days, my sister and I,” she said, turning for one moment to Madame d’Andelys. “It had been better if it had not been so, for, you see, we were not people of the world, but students and thinkers, and when this man-devil, Semenoff, came to our town and we invited him to our hospitality we were foolish enough to believe that he was—a man. And so first my sister and then myself were subjected, first to insidious approaches, then to veiled suggestions, finally to open insult. And neither of us knowing much of the world, nor of the awful power which lies in the hollow of the hand of a man placed in

the position which Semenoff occupied, complained to our husbands. And our husbands, innocent of the world as ourselves, were rash."

The woman paused for a moment and applied her handkerchief to her mouth. When she removed it Rivington believed that he saw it stained with blood. But she presently went on in the same hard, level voice:

"I said—rash. Ah, honest folk are rash, impetuous, impulsive, quick to do things without thinking or counting the cost. It is only your cheat, your hypocrite, your scoundrel who always counts the cost, looks before he leaps, thinks before he speaks. Our husbands, simple-minded students and honest men, dared to beard this devil and to remonstrate with him—nay, more—and very foolishly on their parts—to threaten him with exposure to authorities higher than himself. He mocked them. 'Look well to yourselves, gentlemen,' said he. And his advice was good, and if we had been wise people we should have taken it. We should, had we been wise, I say, have left home and country, for a man like that, once denied his will, is worse than a tiger balked of his prey. His only thought, from that day forward, was of revenge."

Once more she touched her lips with her handkerchief—once more the hard voice broke the tense silence:

“I have said we were fond of gathering our friends about us—we continued our little reunions after this unpleasant episode was, as we hoped, over. Little did we think what we were doing! It was one night in winter that, entertaining a company of our friends, we were surprised by the bursting in upon us of soldiers, headed by Semenoff himself, and told that we were all under arrest. It is true that some of the younger men of our company—hot-headed young students—bade defiance to these intruders and offered resistance. It is true that my husband carried away, perhaps, by the remembrance of the insult offered to me, his wife, struck Semenoff across his lying mouth. It is true, alas, that Semenoff shot my husband dead. He fell dead at my feet.”

That there was blood on the handkerchief now as she took it away from her lips was plain to see. But there were no tears in the hard eyes, and the hard voice was harder than ever:

“When he died I died, too; died to all that I had ever been. I, too, struck Semenoff in the face, hoping he would kill me also. But my por-

tion and that of my sister was the prison cell. There we were subjected to indignities which one would have thought the very fiends of hell could not have imagined. They matter nothing now—but the fires which they lit in our brains are still alive.”

Mad—mad through suffering! The reason of that strange, hard light in the woman’s eyes which Rivington had seen more than once and wondered at was explained to him now—she was mad.

“There was a strange period during which the world seemed to have passed away from us—then we found ourselves, my sister and I, across the frontier, in Germany. But her husband—this man—and our brother, were on their way to Siberia—exiled for life. There, for many long years, they remained, separated. At last they escaped—each bent on revenge. Semenoff still lived—was become a great man—a pillar of the State. And while Semenoff lived there could be no rest for us!”

Rivington raised his hands involuntarily.

“Madame de Marlé!” he cried, “I beg you listen to me. Your wrongs are terrible, irreparable, but what has this woman, whom I love, to do with them? Why is she treated in this way—why?”

Then the hard, level voice broke into almost a shriek of anger.

“Why? Why? Because that woman is Sem-enoff’s daughter—the child of the man who murdered my husband and brother! Blood for blood!—as he took their lives so we will have hers!”

Chapter IV

SENTENCED!

WHEN Rivington heard these terrible words, uttered with a ferocity which would have been inconceivable in the case of any woman in possession of her full mental faculties, he suddenly became conscious that a strange calm was asserting itself in him. He felt as a gambler feels who recognizes with a surprising certainty that he must now play his last stake—and play either to win or lose forever. His overstrung nerves recovered themselves and became steel-like; all thought of his own perilous situation was swept out of him; the only thought he had was how to deal with these three deeply wronged people whose sorrows had turned them mad, and by dealing with them to save Yvette. He turned toward her for one moment—she had grown very pale and her eyes were fixed upon Madame de Marlé with an expression of intense astonishment, but he noted with profound thankfulness that she betrayed no sign of unconquerable fear

—on the contrary, she glanced back at him with something of a smile.

“Courage, Yvette, courage!” he whispered quickly. “Be brave!”

Then he turned to the three somber figures at the table, gazing steadily at Madame de Marlé.

“Madame,” he said in a steady, placatory voice, “you will perhaps let me make an observation on what you have just said?”

“You may speak,” replied Madame de Marlé almost listlessly.

“Then let me point out that there are as yet no proofs, before me at any rate, that this girl is the daughter of the man whom we know as Semenoff. Surely some such proof should be given.”

Madame de Marlé turned to the man who sat between her and her sister.

“Tell what you know,” she said as listlessly as she had spoken to Rivington. “I have spoken.”

The man started a little as if surprised that he should be asked to speak. He cleared his throat two or three times in a tinid, nervous fashion, and when at last he spoke it was in a deprecating manner. He spoke, indeed, as a man speaks who for long years has been held in sub-

jection and is afraid to address any human being lest the result of his speech be a kick or a blow.

"It is all true—that which she—my sister-in-law—has just spoken," he began. "When Sem-enoff did what he did, as she has told, I was sent to Siberia—I and Dubarle. Dubarle, though, went one way on arrival there, I, another. I was a long time there."

He pressed his hand on his temples for a moment as if trying to remember something.

"Sometimes I used to wonder how many years it was that I had been there," he went on at last. "That was after I had been there a long time; I used to forget many things. But I never forgot Semenoff—always I used to dream of escaping and finding him and tearing out his black heart with my teeth and nails. And I suppose I used to speak his name aloud unthinkingly sometimes, for one day a man came to me and said, 'I have heard you curse Semenoff—let us curse him together that he may find his deserts in hell!' And after we had solemnly cursed that devil we talked, and then the man told me that in his day he had been one of Semenoff's tools, and had done so many things for him that it was not safe for Semenoff that this man should be at large, and so he got rid of him and had him

sent to Siberia. Yes, to Siberia. That was where I was for so long a time—Siberia.”

Once more the man pressed his hand upon his forehead. His somber eyes were lighted by a red fire for a moment. Then the gleam died out and he went on in the same dull voice:

“That man died there in Siberia. He knew he was going to die, and before the end came he gave me a paper which I have here to-day. It was about this Semenoff and his daughter, the woman who sits there. It was written by the man himself—see?”

He held up a stained and faded sheet of paper, little more than a rag, on which Rivington could see handwriting in some foreign language.

“This is what this man had written,” continued the dull voice. “It goes as follows:

“‘To anyone concerned in the private history of the Governor General of —— this may be of interest. There is now in the Convent School of Notre Dame at Courbevoie, outside Paris, a girl, entered there under the name of Yvette de St. Evreux, who is the natural daughter of that man by his favorite mistress, a young French actress, Yvette St. Cyr, whom he brought to St. Petersburg and kept there until she died. She was probably the only woman he ever really cared for in his life. When she died the child was

very young and the father commissioned me to take her to Paris and to place her in the convent I have just named. He furnished me with ample funds for this purpose and for her provision for many years. The truth of this statement may be verified by inquiring of the authorities of that convent if these particulars are not correct. That the child's expenses were paid for twenty years in advance. That fifty thousand francs were deposited with Monsieur Gaston de Bargy, the well-known banker, on the child's behalf. That there was a sister there, whose religious name was Teresa, to whose care the child was confided. That the child on attaining the age of eighteen years was to be free to go into the world if she pleased. Anyone comparing these facts with what I have here written will know that this girl is the daughter of Semenoff. But Semenoff himself does not know where she is, for his instructions to me were to take her to a Belgian town—Brussels or Bruges—whereas for reasons of my own I took her to Paris. He made no inquiries concerning her—it may be that anyone who preserves this paper after my death and escapes from this accursed land may find it useful.”

The man folded the paper up and replaced it in his pocket. A silence fell on the room. The three people at the table seemed to have relapsed into a brooding contemplation of their past wrongs. At last Rivington spoke.

“Madame de Marlé, granted that this document is true, that all the facts are as they are there set forth, again I ask you what has this innocent girl, bred in a convent, to do with the crimes which this man committed? You, who have borne so many wrongs, should be the last woman in the world to wrong another. Think, Madame, think!”

Madame de Marlé raised her head slowly and looked steadily at Rivington. His heart sank as he met her eyes—he knew without doubt that he was gazing into the eyes of a madwoman.

“So I should be the last woman in the world to wrong another, should I?” she said, with an intensity of vindictiveness, of hate that made Rivington’s blood run cold. “I will show you what sort of woman I am. For now you shall know, and she shall know, what was in store for her and her father, in Paris, if our carefully laid plans had not been frustrated by you. It was I who arranged that plot—I to whom this man brought that paper when he escaped from Siberia—I to whom Dubarle came when he, too, escaped. It was easy enough to get this girl into our power—she is made of poor, plastic stuff, fit, like her mother, to be a toy for men——”

"That, Madame, woman as you are, is a lie!" exclaimed Rivington.

"—and once in our power she had no will of her own," she continued, paying no heed to him. "We took her to Paris, well knowing that Semenoff would be attracted by her beauty. We meant to use her to lure him on until a day came when he would be in our power—defenseless, helpless—as we were once in his. We meant then to tell him what the relationship between him and this girl was—we would have proved it to him. We meant, before his eyes, to insult her, to degrade her, to use her, as I and my sister were insulted, degraded, used by him and his brutal soldiers years before. And in the end we should have shot both him and his daughter. And you and your allies frustrated that—and you must suffer for it. We will have blood for blood."

Rivington knew that it was useless to argue. He looked at the faces of the men who were guarding himself and Yvette, and he saw no sign of pity or mercy in any of them.

"Madame!" he said. "Semenoff still lives—wreak your vengeance on him—spare this innocent girl!"

"Semenoff lives! Liar!—Semenoff is dead—

dead—dead! He was blown to pieces in St. Petersburg last night, and we are balked of our vengeance—the vengeance that we should have had in Paris had it not been for you. Why should not you pay for your share in what you did? I told you that we know nothing of mercy. You have interfered in something which did not concern you—you have played with edged tools——”

Rivington grew desperate as a rat in a corner. He forgot that he was talking to a mad-woman, that he was pinioned and a prisoner.

“Have a care, Madame de Marlé, have a care!” he cried. “Remember that we are neither in St. Petersburg nor Paris, but in London. Whatever you may do to this girl and me bear in mind the fact that you cannot escape detection. Kill me—kill her—and you put a rope round your own neck—not only you, but every man in this room. I warn you!” he went on, facing the men who stood by him. “Whatever happens here now you cannot escape the consequences. I say again, you are in London——”

“And you are in our power as securely as if the seven of us and the two of you were on a mountain peak in the Andes,” said Madame de Marlé, with a fiendish sneer. “London! ’Tis the

safest place in the world for our business, my friend."

"I shall be traced to this place," said Rivington. "My friends will obtain the assistance of the police——"

"We never even think of the police. They are imbeciles, having neither eyes, ears, nor intelligence."

"The whole place will be searched," continued Rivington. "Even your secret chambers will be discovered—you yourselves will be arrested."

"That indeed we shall not, for we shall not be here to arrest, and there is not a police officer or agent in the world clever enough to arrest us where we are going! We shall leave this girl here dead—as for you, when you get out of this place, you may use all your wits, spend all your money, stir up your pig-headed government, do what you please, but you will never find one of those who have you in their power to-night."

There was something so dreadful, so menacing, and also so sure and certain in the tone in which these words were uttered that Rivington, cold with fear of what might almost immediately happen before his very eyes, felt that it was useless to speak further. He turned to Yvette. She was now pale as marble, but she had found some

strength somewhere within her, and her hands, folded in her lap, were steady as her lips and eyes. As Rivington turned to her she spoke.

"Madame de Marlé," she said quietly, "may I speak? I cannot understand the things that have been said to-night, but if it is true that this man who so cruelly wronged you and yours was my father, I ask God's forgiveness and yours for him. And though I never wronged you, Madame de Marlé, I am ready to die if it would give you any ease from the pain that must be wearing your life out. But it will not do that, Madame, it will not do that, for you will some day remember that I was innocent as a child—perhaps when all the agony of mind is past. I am in your power—but, oh, do no harm to——"

She turned and looked at Rivington and made as if she would stretch out her arms to him. He half rose—the men pressed him back in his chair and held him firmly. Yvette went on:

"He did all this for love of me—and now, now, when"—she faltered, and then continued bravely, looking at Rivington as she spoke—"when, it seems, we must part, it is bitter to think that all my love and life, which is all his, can never be given to him. Oh, Madame, if

you are a woman, if you have a woman's heart——”

Rivington knew that the end was coming. The madwoman at the table started up with a fierce cry.

“Enough! Comrades—you before whom we have put our case—who have heard everything—who know how we have suffered—justice, justice! Judge you this woman—the spawn of that devil who ruined me and mine!”

“What right have these men to judge? Who are they?” cried Rivington.

One of the men spoke.

“We are the heads of a certain secret section to which Madame belongs,” he replied. “Madame, as a member of that section, cannot take justice into her own hands. She can only lay her case before us and ask us to decide.”

“I refuse your right to decide,” exclaimed Rivington. “It is an outrage—it is——”

But the four men took no heed. The two behind him pinned him securely to his chair and whispered over his head in some language unknown to him. The other two, guarding Yvette, engaged in a similar conference. The three people at the table looked from one face to the other

with eager eyes. But in Madame de Marlé's eyes there was murder. !

The man who had previously spoken, after a nod from Yvette's guardians, spoke again.

"We have decided. It is but just that the progeny of such an incarnate fiend as Semenoff's existence proved him to be should be removed from the earth as one removes the possible seeds of disease and degeneracy, lest the poison inherent in them should spread. We sentence this woman to death by anæsthesia."

Madame de Marlé sprang to her feet.

"Anæsthesia! A painless death! No! I say no! I demand her torture. Insult for insult, outrage for outrage——"

The spokesman of the four lifted one hand.

"Calm yourself, Madame de Marlé," he said in cold tones. "Remember your oath. We have spoken. Let this finish. Lead the woman to the chamber."

Rivington, mad with rage, horror, despair, helplessness, leaped to his feet; clearing himself of his guardians' hands by a supreme effort. He made a dash toward Yvette.

"No!" he shouted. "No! I tell you no! This is murder! By God, I say you shall not—you shall not——"

He lifted his manacled hands to bring them down with all his force on the head of the man who stood between him and Yvette, but ere the blow fell he was himself struck down violently from behind, and he sank, sank, sank into a great sea of blankness that came welling up in slowly widening waves.

Chapter V

THE GLEAM OF STEEL

"I AM alive and she is dead. I am alive and she is dead. I am alive and she is dead. She is dead. She is dead—dead—dead—she is dead!"

Some voice was saying these words over and over again in the darkness—now whispering them, now sobbing them, but always repeating them without ceasing. But whose voice? Surely not his own. No, it could not be his, because he was asleep, or dreaming, or in another world, or mad. Perhaps, after all, he was dead, too. And that would be better than anything that could be, because she was certainly dead. They had killed her.

Somewhere, deep down in his tortured brain, slowly fighting its way back to life and consciousness, something began to sing:

"She is dead and gone, lady,
She is dead and gone!"

Some other strange voice broke in on that—

“Strew over her roses, roses,
But never a spray of yew.
In quiet she reposes—
Ah, would that I did, too!”

But of whom did these voices sing, and who was it that would not cease from that wearying cry?

“I am alive and she is dead. I am alive and she is dead. I am alive and she is dead. She is dead. She is dead—dead—dead—dead—she is dead!”

He came suddenly out of the shadowy borderland which lies betwixt the unconscious and the conscious—came out of it as suddenly as a lightning flash darts through a cloud bank. And he wished then that he was back in the unknown, or dead, for he remembered and realized.

Rivington found himself lying on a couch in Madame de Marlé's drawing room. He knew that it must be just before dawn, for there was a faint gray light stealing through the curtained windows. A light just strong enough to enable him to see the objects about him. He himself was bound securely. His arms were lashed to his sides, his feet were similarly fastened together. Yet whoever had placed him in his present position had done so with some regard to

his comfort. There was a cushion underneath his head, and some hand had undone his collar and cravat. In the midst of his agony of mind he laughed at this refinement of cruelty.

The back of his head ached and throbbed violently. He felt sore all over his body. But the physical pain was as nothing when compared with the mental pain. He wondered how long he had lain there, how long it was since they had struck him down and carried Yvette off to that infernal den. Was she dead? He writhed in his torture and tried to cry out, mocking himself the next instant for his impotence and uselessness.

All around him was a dead silence. He could hear nothing. The place was as quiet as the cell in which he had been confined and in which he now pictured Yvette lying dead. Oh, if he were only dead with her—if they had only let them die together!

He passed from this stage to one of weeping, of wild cryings upon fate, upon heaven, upon God, and from that to one of fierce imprecations. He would escape from this hell yet, he would ransack every corner of the earth for these murderers, and as he met them would torture them, agonize them, rend them limb from limb, trample

their flesh into the dust, gloat over their sufferings. . . .

A sudden sound in the intense stillness caused the sweat to burst out in great beads all over his body. What was it—who was it? It came again—he listened. It sounded like the grating of a key in a lock somewhere far off. Then silence again. And then another sound—another—another . . .

Footsteps!

Rivington lay in a position which enabled him to command a full view of the heavy curtains that covered the entrance to the principal corridor. It was along that corridor that the footsteps were coming, softly but swiftly. Another moment and the curtains were drawn aside and a figure glided into the dim morning light.

Madame de Marlé!

He could see little of her face, but as she turned toward the windows he caught the gleam of her eyes, and he knew that he was alone with a madwoman and at her mercy. He closed his eyes to shut out the sight of her.

When he opened them a moment afterward, forced to do so because of some movement on her part, he saw that she had crossed over to a cabinet in the opposite corner of the room to

that in which he lay and was unlocking one of the drawers. She took something from it that rang like metal as it tapped against the wood. And as she turned away again into the circle of gray light Rivington caught the gleam of steel.

It was a long, cruel-looking dagger which she had taken from the drawer, and she held it up to the light and kissed it. He could see her face now—it was lighted with a demoniac joy, and when she spoke it was not the voice of a woman that spoke, but of one demented.

“They thought to cheat me of my due!” she said in a low, penetrating, half-crooning tone. “Thought to cheat me! But I will have blood for blood. She will not be dead yet—I will revive her—tend her—nurse her back to life carefully—carefully—toy with her as a cat with its mouse, and then stab her to the heart and see her blood flow—the blood she got from him—his blood—his blood! That is right—that is the eternal law—blood for blood!”

As she stood feeling the edge of the long, dagger-like knife, Rivington, whose heart was bursting to suffocation, was attracted once more to the curtains by the slightest of sounds. He turned, gazed——

A human hand—a man's hand—appeared through the aperture of the curtains—slowly, gently putting them aside. It might have been the hand of a spirit—so mysteriously did it appear, outlining itself against the dark fabric behind it.

Rivington's eyes were fascinated by this hand. He watched it begin to gather the edge of the curtain together slowly, noiselessly. And suddenly, yet as quietly as the hand had appeared, appeared a face.

Wells!

He could have cried out, shouted, in his joy and relief, but his dry tongue refused to move, and he could only lie and watch. What was going to happen, and, oh, was it too late to save Yvette?

The distraught woman was still rambling on as she gazed ecstatically at the knife. Now she was coherent, now incoherent—once or twice she pressed her hand to her forehead as if she were trying to remember something. But at last she turned again to the cabinet.

"The key!" she said. "The key—my own private key! They would have had me forego my vengeance, would they? Oh, no, no! that could not be. There must be justice. I must have blood

for blood. Nothing but blood will quench this fire in my brain."

Wells was in the room now; he was creeping up behind her on feet ready to spring, his lithe, muscular arms were outstretched, his fingers outspread, his body bent forward, half crouching. A sudden movement on the woman's part—a leap forward on his—a quick cry—the sound of falling steel. He had leaped upon her, thrown the knife out of her hand with a quick jerk of the wrist, and overthrowing her bodily at the same moment had pinned her to the floor. And it seemed then to Rivington that the room had suddenly become full of people, for there were Etheredge and Miss Maxwell and some strange men and all was confusion, above which Wells's voice suddenly rose clear and strong:

"That'll do—she's safe now. Tear those curtains down—get some light into this hellish place! Ah, what's this?—Rivington, by God! Not dead—here, brandy, brandy, Etheredge—he's trying to speak. Cut those cords somebody—now, then, Daubs, buck up—there, there—speak, man!—where's the girl—the girl?"

Whose voice was it that came from somewhere far off, traveling so fast and so hard and yet so tediously and slowly? Surely not his own!

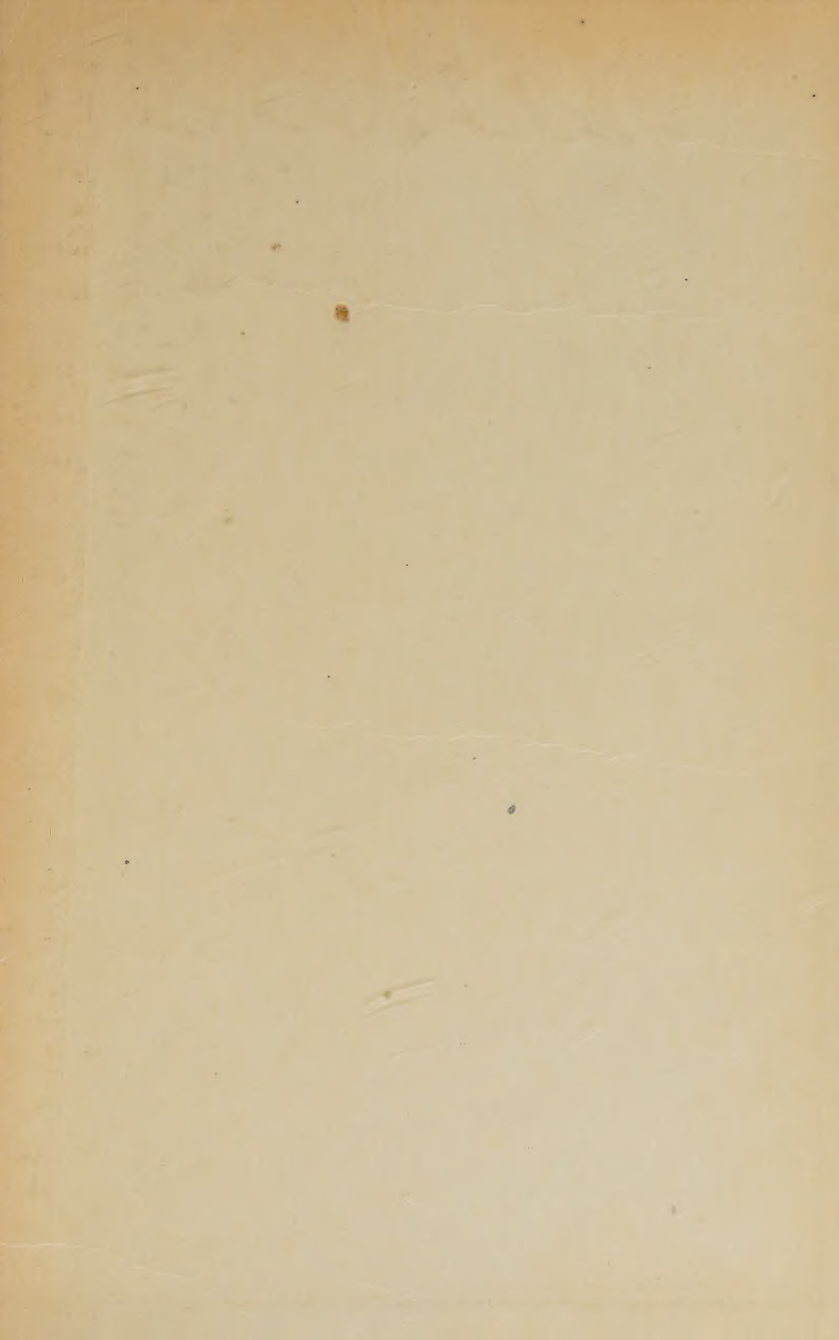
“Dogger—Yvette—first door behind curtains—perhaps dead—quick—key—in woman’s hand there—quick!”

He lay in Etheredge’s arms watching, watching, until they carried Yvette, motionless, death-like, into the room, and one man whom somebody called “Doctor” bent over her. And then came a long, long time—and then Wells’s face was close to his own, and Wells’s voice was in his ear, cheery, confident:

“It’s all right, old chap. She’s alive—she’s coming round—it’s all right!”

Then for the second time he sank down again into the black waters—but the words “It’s all right!” went with him.

THE END





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